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Knowing God Personally

The Christian Message to the Muslim World

By John Gilchrist

Introduction: True Faith or Formal Monotheism?

Christians and Muslims have many things in common. They believe in one God, worship in holy sanctuaries (churches and mosques), have similar annual religious calendars (Christmas, Good Friday and Easter for Christians, Eid ul-Fitr, Eid ul-Adha, Laylatu'l Mir'aj and Laylatu'l Qadr for Muslims), and set aside one day a

week for a major community worship service (Sunday and Friday respectively). Outwardly both religions can look very similar. Their worship services can be very formal and repetitive. The Muslim *salat*, in particular, follows the same pattern day after day, year after year, decade after decade without variation. The *adhan*, the call to prayer, never changes. The *hajj* pilgrimage perpetuates an exact sequence of religious practices which have been observed unaltered for fourteen centuries. Many Christian churches are no different. Catholic and Orthodox priests chant out the same prescribed prayers week after week just as Muslim imams do.

Some years ago a Muslim woman said to me “Whenever I go to the cemetery I look at all the Muslim graves on the one side and the Christian graves on the other, and I say to myself, ‘What’s the difference?’” Well, if you’re looking for the living among the dead, you’re not likely to find much. Judaism is not very different. All three monotheisms have institutionalised their religious systems, going round in circles as they return annually to the same routines, ceremonies and holy days, all based on outward conformity and formal worship. A Muslim shopkeeper in Jerusalem once said “There are only three big businesses in Jerusalem. One collects money on Fridays, the second on Saturdays, and the third on Sundays.” (The quote is from the Discovery video *Jerusalem: City of Heaven*).

Formal monotheism. Is this really what God wants? A slavish commitment to repetitive ceremonies for as long as we live? A verse from the Bible shows how monotonous and ultimately meaningless this can be. I will accentuate the key words to emphasise the point: ‘And *every* priest stands *daily* at his service, offering *repeatedly* the *same* sacrifices, which can *never* take away sins’ (*Hebrews 10:11*). The irony is obvious when you compare the repetitions with their inability to achieve anything: every – daily – repeatedly – the same – yet *never* availing!

Islam places a tremendous emphasis on formal, repetitive worship. There is no room for spontaneous prayer or praise while performing each *raka’ah*. A true Muslim will not only wear a beard but will trim it to a prescribed length to follow the *sunnah* of Muhammad. A skullcap must be worn while praying in a mosque. Shoes must be removed. The same motions of washing beforehand (*wudhu*) must always be followed in obedience to the Qur’anic injunction: ‘Wash your faces, and your hands up to the elbows, and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles’ (*Surah 5:6*). Each *ruku* (bowing down) and *sajdah* (prostration) must be performed in unison with the other worshippers present, in the same way, at the same times, every day. During the *qa’dah* (the sitting position) the same *taslim* must be recited as each worshipper passes the greeting to his left and right. No variation of this ceremony is allowed at any time.

Islam claims to simply restate the original religion of submission to God that all the previous prophets followed and imposed. The Qur’an says that it came only as a *tasdiq*, a ‘confirmation’ of what was before it (*Surah 10:37*) and not as a new form of religion. If so, the true religion of God must always have focused on formal, repetitive submission, the homage of a servant to a divine Master who can neither be personally known nor loved for who he really is.

The Bible paints a very different picture. It does not see God’s religion as always the same, simply a conformity to exact patterns of worship that have never changed and never will. As it covers the history of God’s relationship with his people, it shows a progression and expansion as God draws ever nearer to his own, and it finishes with a glorious climax when he takes the initiative to redeem his people and invites them to a living, personal relationship with him. Not as servants bound to do his bidding, mind you, but as children born of his Holy Spirit, forgiven of their sins, and booked for eternal glory. Join me on a journey as we discover the Christian message to the Muslim world.

Cain and Abel: The Only Acceptable Sacrifice

We have many religions on earth. They include Judaism founded by Moses, Christianity by Jesus, Islam by Muhammad, Buddhism by Gautama Buddha, and many others like Hinduism without any known originators. Heaven, however, sees only three. The first is *Antitheism*. It is the worship of anything other than God, the creature rather than the Creator. Whether it is the veneration of pagan idols, ancestral spirits or other beings, it makes no difference. It’s all the same to the angels of heaven – the worship of anything and everything *but* the true God. The Bible describes antitheists perfectly: ‘for although they knew God they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles’ (*Romans 1:21-23*). The definition concludes: ‘they exchanged the truth about God

for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen' (*Romans 1:25*).

The only other two religions on earth, as heaven sees them, are the oldest that have ever existed. They were founded on the same day by two brothers and, outwardly, they can look very similar. The brothers were Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. On the day that the first religious ceremonies were ever performed on earth, Cain and Abel each brought an offering to God. Cain had become a farmer, a tiller of the ground. So he brought a portion of the fruits of his labour and offered it to God. Abel, however, had become a shepherd, so he brought a different present, a sacrifice of his young lambs and their fat portions. There seemed to be no real difference between the two offerings, but the Bible says 'the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard' (*Genesis 4:4-5*). What followed is well-known: Cain was angry and rose up against his brother, killing him in a field.

The Qur'an confirms the story: 'And relate to them the story of the two sons of Adam with truth, when they offered a sacrifice which was accepted from one of them but not accepted from the other. He said: I will certainly kill you' (*Surah 5:27*). Neither book states why Cain's sacrifice was rejected, but the Bible goes on to show why Abel found favour with God. It says 'By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking' (*Hebrews 11:4*). The key words are the first two: *by faith* Abel won God's favour.

Abel's sacrifice tells you what that faith was. He presented the shed blood of his lambs. Abel loved the Lord, but he was painfully aware that he could, at times, be as cold to him as his brother Cain was. He knew he was implicated in his parents' sin in the Garden of Eden and that he could offer nothing to God from the fruit of his own labours to redeem himself. He also knew, however, that God had warned the serpent in the garden: 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' (*Genesis 3:15*). This clear statement that God would one day raise a Saviour from Eve's descendants who would suffer severely to achieve human salvation, but would fatally injure the serpent at the same time and deliver her offspring from its power, was Abel's hope. His sacrifice sent its own message: "I know my sinfulness and that I can by no religious means commend myself to you, but I am offering back to you something that is your own, slain with its shed blood, because I sense my redemption will come at considerable cost to you." Abel was the first man to offer *true faith* to God. This is the second religion heaven sees, and it is the only true one. It is the *Faith of Abel*.

Cain, however, had no true love for God. He did not believe he was implicated in his parents' sin. He also told God that he did not believe he was his brother's keeper either (*Genesis 4:9*). He killed Abel in cold blood. Yet Cain was prepared to acknowledge God as his Creator and so he also brought a present, but his was only a gesture, a token offering from the abundance of his labours. He would have been willing to worship God occasionally, but regarded his life as his own and believed he was free to exploit the earth for his benefit alone. He would come round every now and again to salute God, perhaps once a week or for a harvest ceremony once a year, but no more. Cain was the founder of *formal monotheism*, worshipping God without truly loving him. This is the *Religion of Cain*, the third religion heaven sees, and it regards it as entirely false. It is the largest religion on earth today and embraces every expression of formal monotheism, whether Judaic, Christian or Islamic. God himself summed it up in these words: 'This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment of men learned by rote' (*Isaiah 29:13*).

Cain's anger showed the difference between him and his brother. He might well have retorted: "I would have been willing to come round many times to salute you, once a week if need be. Why did you reject my first offering so completely?" God's answer to him would have been: "Abel made only a single offering, but it was an all-embracing commitment of his whole life to me, trusting me for his salvation. I will one day, by a single offering of my own, perfect for all time those who are sanctified" (*Hebrews 10:14*). The Faith of Abel is the only true religion the world has known or ever will know. It is a vibrant, living faith as opposed to dry, outward conformity. It offers God nothing of its own, it trusts God entirely for its salvation. It does not look on the outward appearance and say *what am I?* A Muslim, Jew or Christian identified by my dress, beard, head-covering, robes, weekly worship attendance, etc, signifying my allegiance to a particular religion? No, it asks the acid question *who am I?* How deeply within my own soul do I love God and how willing am I to pursue his

perfect honesty, purity, love and righteousness? After my religious dress is removed, my beard shaved off, my priest's robes put away, what is left? What do I have *within* myself to commend me to God? There is only one true religion on earth – it is human *faith* responding to God's *faithfulness*, a theme we will explore more fully as we press on.

Abraham: The Father of the Faithful

All Muslims honour Ibrahim *alayhis-salam*. He is regarded as one of the greatest messengers of God. Christians likewise look to him as a prototype of a true believer and the father of the faithful. He followed the *true faith*, the Faith of Abel, and true Christians are said to be 'those who share the faith of Abraham for he is the father of us all' (*Romans 4:16*). The Qur'an likewise speaks of the *millata abikum Ibrahim*, the "faith of our father Abraham" (*Surah 22:78*). But why is Abraham marked out for his faith and not for his religious submission to God?

The Qur'an sees the *millah* of Abraham as no more than unquestioning submission to the will of Allah. It says that he was one of the *musliman*, a "submitter" (*Surah 3:67*) and states that 'when his Lord said to him Submit!, he said I submit to the Lord of the worlds' (*Surah 2:131*). The command for "submit" in the text is *Aslim!* and his response is *aslamtu*, "I have submitted." All three words come from the same root letters as *islam* and *muslim*. This is not true faith, however. It is no more than an uncomprehending resignation to God's will. It does not tax the prophet's faith in God's faithfulness.

The Bible shows that God called Abraham to a much deeper relationship with him than mere submission to his will. It begins with a simple promise which God made to him when he complained that he had no heir to his estate: 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them ... so shall your descendants be' (*Genesis 15:5*). What follows is equally simply stated: 'And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness' (*Genesis 15:6*). It seems too easy – Abraham just took the promise at face value and, because he believed God, he was declared righteous in his sight. He did not have to pray a number of times a day, fast for many months, go on pilgrimages or donate large sums to the poor to obtain God's approval. He just believed the promise and was immediately placed on an even footing with God.

His faith was to be tested again and again, however. Many years passed without anything happening. His wife Sarah, who had never been able to bear children and was growing older every year, told him to procreate offspring through her maid Hagar (*Genesis 16:2*). When Ishmael was born, Abraham was convinced that he must be the heir who was promised but, just thirteen years later when Abraham was 99 years old and his wife Sarah already 90 and still barren, God said to him: 'I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her' (*Genesis 17:16*). At first Abraham laughed at the prospect, but then it dawned on him that Ishmael was obviously not the child of the promise. So he cried out to God 'O that Ishmael might live in your sight!' but God answered: 'No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him' (*Genesis 17:18-19*).

When Isaac was finally born, Sarah demanded that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. The patriarch was sore-pressed, but God confirmed her wish, advising Abraham at the same time that he would nevertheless make a great nation out of him. Still, Abraham was severely tested as he realised Ishmael had been rejected by God. At fourteen years of age he was sent away into the wilderness.

Whenever Abraham looked on the new youngster he at least knew for certain that he was the child who had been promised. He looked forward to the day when Isaac would rise up as the fulfilment of God's promise that he would become the father of many nations. But, when Isaac had reached a similar age as Ishmael's when he was sent away, God finally spoke to the patriarch again. 'Abraham!' he suddenly called out (*Genesis 22:1*). Abraham responded willingly, expecting to hear God define how his son was now to become a blessing to the generations to come. Instead God said to him: 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you' (*Genesis 22:2*). (The Qur'an records the incident but does not name or otherwise identify the son who was to be sacrificed – *Surah 37:102*. It does, however, confirm that the line of *nubuwwah* – prophethood, and *kitab* – scripture, would follow through Isaac's line – *Surah 29:27*.)

This was a far greater test for the patriarch. When Ishmael started turning into a young man, God told Abraham

to reject him, but now, as Isaac reached the same budding moment in his life, God told Abraham to slaughter him! It was the supreme test of a man's love for God – to offer his son to him. If he would not spare his son, surely he would give him all he had (*cf. Romans 8:32*). It was the best any man could offer to God.

But Abraham was facing a far sterner test. God had promised him he would have descendants like the stars of the sky through his son Isaac. How could this promise possibly be fulfilled if he was to offer him up as a burnt offering? Abraham must have pictured the scene – his son cremated to ashes after being sacrificed and, as the wind came down and blew the ashes away, he would have imagined himself despairing “there goes the promise of God to the wind.”

By this time, however, Abraham had gone far beyond just submitting to God's will without asking further questions. When God, on another occasion not long before this, had threatened to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, the patriarch objected: ‘Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (*Genesis 18:23-25*)

How could a prophet argue with God's decrees? This was not humble submission. But God honoured it, eventually promising not to destroy the cities if just ten righteous people could be found in them. (They weren't, and only Lot and his two daughters were eventually saved from their destruction.)

There's more to this than meets the eye. Abraham was calling on God to be true to himself. Believing that God is faithful, he placed all his faith in God's faithfulness. That is why he reacted when he heard something that seemed to deny that faithfulness. ‘Every word of God proves true’ the scripture declares (*Proverbs 30:5*), and Abraham faced the command to sacrifice his son with the same dilemma. How could God's promise be fulfilled if he was to sacrifice Isaac? He could have said to himself “I don't know but it doesn't matter. God has commanded me to destroy him, so I will. I'll just unquestioningly submit to his will. The unfulfilled promise will be his problem, not mine.”

But Abraham didn't. He knew that his faith, which had earned him a declaration that he was righteous in God's sight, was merely a reflection of God's faithfulness. The sun generates light, blazing light. The moon can do no more than feebly reflect it but, as it faces the sun head on, it reflects that light to the full. Take away the moon and the sun's sparkling light will be totally unaffected, but take away the sun and the moon will not shine at all. So God generates faithfulness as the sun generates light, but Abraham's faith was like the moon's light – no more than a reflection of God's glorious faithfulness.

Yet Abraham held to that faith. Like Abel, he continued to follow the only true religion in the world: *true faith*, and like Abel he was commended for it: ‘By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son of whom it was said “Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.” He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.’ (*Hebrews 11:17-19*)

God honoured Abraham and restored his son to him. He had passed the supreme test. He had been willing to give the greatest blessing in his life back to God, his only true son, and in this he perfected his faith, believing God would yet fulfil his promise to him by raising his son back to life. For this Abraham received a very special title. He was called *the friend of God*. Jehoshaphat, a righteous king of Judah many centuries later, prayed to God: ‘Did you not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before your people Israel, and give it for ever to the descendants of Abraham your friend?’ (*2 Chronicles 20:7*) God himself once spoke of the nation of Israel as ‘the offspring of Abraham, my friend’ (*Isaiah 41:8*). James, an early disciple of Jesus and his blood-brother, also wrote of Abraham's faith and added ‘he was called the friend of God’ (*James 2:23*).

The Qur'an confirms the title: ‘For God did take Abraham for a friend’ (*Surah 4:125*). The Arabic word here is *khalilan*, “a friend”, and Abraham has consequently always been known in Islam as *khalilullah*, the Friend of God. The Qur'an gives no explanation for the title, however.

In the Biblical record, however, we can see more and more what true faith really is. God wants to have a living relationship with his people. He desires this far more than strict obedience to religious routines, observance of

ceremonies and a repetitive adherence to prescribed prayers, prayer-times, etc. This will become ever more apparent as we proceed. At present, however, let us mark the symbol of Abraham's recognition – *true faith*. God did not forcefully project his righteousness at him, expecting him to respond in perfect righteousness and obedience to his every demand. No matter how religious, pious or devoted any man may be, he cannot match God's perfect righteousness. His sin will pull him down again and again.

God elected to project his *faithfulness* to Abraham and was delighted when the prophet responded consistently to it *by faith*, eventually perfecting it when being commanded to offer his son as a sacrifice. We will have more to say about it when we come to the climax we spoke about earlier. We will see how Abraham's sacrificial faith was only a shadow of God's sacrificial love yet to be revealed. For the moment, however, let us press on to the next great patriarch in Israel's history, Moses, and see how God's plans and purposes for his people continued to expand and grow.

Moses: The Man who Knew God Face-to-Face

More than four hundred years passed before God moved again to communicate directly with his people. After forty years of prosperity as a prince in Egypt, and a further forty years in the Sinai wilderness as a fugitive from justice, Moses suddenly found himself face-to-face with the God of Israel. God called him to deliver the nation from Pharaoh's rule and, after a series of plagues which finally broke the back of Egyptian resistance, Moses led the people into the same wilderness on their way to the promised land, Canaan.

The final scene in this famous story needs to be retold here. Pharaoh only relented when an angel from God slew the first-born of every family in Egypt in just one night. Only the Israelites who had obeyed God's word to sacrifice a passover lamb were exempted. They had been instructed to 'touch the lintel and the two doorposts' of their homes 'with the blood which is in the basin' (*Exodus 12:22*) and were further told to 'observe this rite as an ordinance for you and for your sons for ever' (*Exodus 12:24*). The angel of death would then *pass over* the home. A clear trend was developing as God's relationship with his people progressed. Abel had offered the blood of his lambs as an atoning sacrifice, shadowing a far greater sacrifice to come. Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac as a similar token of a greater offering to follow. Now the people of Israel were commanded to place the shed blood of their sacrificial lambs across their doorposts. True faith was beginning to define itself. The hope of all God's true people, trusting solely in his grace and not their religiousness, was increasingly being focused on the shed blood of the true Lamb of God to follow. True believers discerned this, and placed their faith in God's redemptive grace yet to be fully revealed.

Not long after their exodus from Egypt, God instructed Moses: 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready by the third day; for on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people' (*Exodus 19:10-11*). On the third day the people trembled as God's presence was manifested on the mountain. There God spoke directly to the nation, giving it the ten commandments that were to become the backbone of Jewish moral law thereafter. It was a unique occasion, one for which God had been preparing for centuries.

Moses was not visited by an angel as a mediator from heaven. God himself drew near to the prophet and the nation, expressing his desire to relate closely to the people of Israel thereafter. To reveal his presence among them, God told Moses to build an ark with a mercy seat above it and said: 'There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel' (*Exodus 25:22*).

The nation had visible proof that God himself was present among them. Whenever Moses entered the holy tent he had constructed as a tabernacle where the ark was placed, a 'pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the door of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses' (*Exodus 33:9*). When the people saw the cloud, they would rise up and worship. The story concludes: 'Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend' (*Exodus 33:11*). Moses was overwhelmed that God was willing to relate so directly to him and the people as to manifest his presence among them. He said to God: 'Is it not in your going with us that we are distinct, I and your people, from all other people that are upon the face of the earth?' (*Exodus 33:16*)

Very boldly Moses prayed 'I pray you, show me your glory.' God responded: 'I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, 'the Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious

and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (*Exodus 33:18-19*).

With respect, even at this stage God's revealed presence and favour go far beyond anything comparable in Islam. Far greater intimacy, fellowship, grace and favour between God and his own were to follow, but even at this stage the relationship between God and his people had far exceeded the highest of Muslim expectations. God himself was visibly present among them. The cloud, which was a special manifestation of his presence, hovered over the mercy seat by day and shone at night. When it moved, the nation knew it had to follow and stay close to God as he dwelt among his people.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with two tablets containing the ten commandments, inscribed by God himself, 'Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God' (*Exodus 34:29*). Whenever he came out from speaking to the Lord, 'the people of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone' (*Exodus 34:35*). The Qur'an confirms the unique, direct relationship between God and Moses: 'And to Moses Allah spoke directly' (*Surah 4:164*). It says nothing further, but confirms the special relationship between them. The story of Moses in the Bible concludes with these words: 'And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face' (*Deuteronomy 34:10*).

Abraham was called the friend of God. Moses spoke to God face to face as a man speaks to his friend. We see here the growing supreme purpose of God steadily being revealed. God's presence was so closely manifested that Moses' face shone when he spoke to him. God was going far beyond religious observances. His ultimate desire that his people should relate personally to him and know him directly was being increasingly revealed as time went on.

Unfortunately God's immediate presence brought constant tensions and conflict between him and the people of Israel. Time and again they distrusted and rebelled against him. Right from the start, when God called the nation to hear his word and receive his ten commandments, the people said to Moses 'You speak to us and we will hear, but let not God speak to us, lest we die' (*Exodus 20:19*). When Moses went up the mountain to converse with God over forty days, the people rose up and tried to shake off his presence and power over them. They made a golden calf and worshiped it, promptly proceeding to break every commandment they could to tell him precisely what they thought of him.

God's anger grew deep within him. Time and again he threatened to destroy them. 'I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them', God declared (*Exodus 32:9-10*). A benevolent but righteous God among an unholy and malevolent people – conflict was inevitable. The nation did not want to draw near to God. For their unbelief he kept them wandering with minimal food and water for forty years in the wilderness. Despite all his favours towards them, the people just would not draw near to him. Living so closely among them, their sinfulness and hard-heartedness inevitably ground sharply against his righteousness and holiness.

'And now, Israel,' Moses declared, 'what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord which I command you this day for your good?' (*Deuteronomy 10:12-13*). In this Moses revealed God's ultimate aim – a deep mutual relationship based on reciprocated love and obedience towards him. Even though he regulated various forms of religious ceremonies and observances to constantly draw out at least a formal worship towards him, they turned against him. From the depths of their hearts they did not want to draw near to him in purity, honesty, faithfulness and love. Quite simply, they would have preferred to turn back to their former slavery in Egypt than live by faith in his faithfulness and allow his Spirit to examine the depths of their hearts and souls.

At one point, after tiring of the manna God sent them from above every day to eat, some of the 'rabble that was among them had a strong craving; and the people of Israel also wept again, and said: "O that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic, but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at"' (*Numbers 11:4-6*). Later generations honoured the manna with religious devotion as bread from heaven itself, but the Israelites at the time simply complained to Moses 'we loathe this worthless food' (*Numbers 21:5*).

Once they had entered the land of Canaan, the visible cloud above the mercy-seat faded away. The manna sent to

feed them daily ceased. God could see that they could not match or reflect his righteousness and could only be exposed to wrath and judgment if he continued to manifest his presence so obviously to them. So he let go of the nation, still living among his people, but withdrawing his visible presence to avoid further face-to-face conflict. Patiently God watched and waited as the following generations came and went. Some centuries later God again began to make his presence felt among the people of Israel. Another man arose with a burning love for God, a strong man who could unite the nation, and God moved to relate to him as it appeared his hopes for the nation might yet begin to materialise.

David: A Man after God's Own Heart

When David became king of Israel, God said: 'I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my own heart, who will do all my will' (*Acts 13:22*). He was not talking of David's religiousness, outward adornment, or reverence for holy days, he was speaking of his inner being – his upright spirit, love for God, refined character, personal sincerity and deep faith. David expressed his devotion to God in his many psalms. He was a man of great weaknesses and failings, yet in spite of these he longed for God and turned his heart constantly towards him. He prayed: 'As a deer longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God' (*Psalms 42:1-2*).

In another of his praise songs David declared: 'I love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies' (*Psalms 18:1-3*). He was not reciting from a prayer-book, he was expressing the depth of his belief in God. He knew that true faith came from the core of a soul turned towards God. He did not project an outward appearance of uprightness to the world around him while remaining unregenerate within himself. He longed to be pure in all his thoughts, words and deeds. He cried out: 'Search me, O God, and try my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!' (*Psalms 139:23-24*)

When he did fail he examined his heart and prayed: 'Behold, you desire truth in the inward being, therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart' (*Psalms 51:6*), going on to plead: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit' (*Psalms 51:10-12*). True humility before God also comes out as his prayer continues: 'The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise' (*Psalms 51:17*). David was chosen to lead Israel because his heart was true to God. He understood true faith. He knew it was a willingness to pursue inner renewal, a response to God's perfect faithfulness. When God commanded Samuel to anoint David king of Israel, he said to him: 'the Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart' (*1 Samuel 16:7*). David knew and understood this.

Throughout his life David strived to unite the nation of Israel in the worship of the one true God. When he was able to rest after subduing all his enemies, David said to the prophet Nathan 'See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent.' Nathan replied 'Go, do all that is in your heart; for the Lord is with you' (*2 Samuel 7:2-3*). David proposed to build a great temple for God, to bring the people of Israel constantly together to worship God where his glory dwelt. But God told Nathan to speak to David and say: 'When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. I will be his father, and he shall be my son' (*2 Samuel 7:12-14*). God told him that his son would build the temple he proposed and concluded by promising: 'Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever' (*2 Samuel 7:16*).

As God had promised Abraham a son, so now he promised one to David as well. Solomon was the son promised and after his father's death he set about building the first Jewish Temple. In the generations to follow the people of Israel sensed that, while Solomon was the immediate son promised, the prophecy also spoke of a *greater* son to follow. God had assured David that the promised son would rule over his kingdom for ever. When Solomon died the people soon realised the prophecy would only be completely fulfilled when the *greater* Son of David arrived and they looked forward to his day. Significantly God had said to David that the greater son to come would be his *own* Son. God had added unambiguously "I will be his Father, and he shall be *my* Son."

The prophecy is found in the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament), not some later Christian work. Like Muslims Jews have never believed that God has a Son, but right here, in one of their own books (2 Samuel) revered as the Word of God by all Jews throughout the generations since it was written, God's promise that his own Son would come into the world to establish his eternal kingdom was plainly foretold. The promise is confirmed in another passage: 'He shall cry to me, "You are my father, my God and the Rock of my salvation." And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens' (*Psalms* 89:26-29). This quote is also from another of the core books of Jewish Scripture, written a thousand years before Christianity began.

Both promises of a son to come, made to Abraham and David, came suddenly without any precedents or anticipation. As you read through the Jewish Scriptures you cannot but be amazed at how striking both prophecies are as there is nothing in the build-up before them to give the slightest hint of what was coming. God simply chose an appropriate moment to speak of things to come as his purposes for mankind and plans for its redemption unfolded.

When Solomon had completed the Temple and the priests came out of it after placing the ark of the covenant in the holiest place: 'A cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord' (*1 Kings* 8:10-11). Once again God visibly manifested his presence to the nation as he had done when Moses completed the tabernacle in the wilderness. Islam has never had anything comparable to this.

During those forty years when the Israelites had wandered around the desert regions because of their unbelief, the nation was stripped of its fertile surroundings and given nothing but manna to eat and water to drink. The people chafed under the pressure as God tested them severely to see whether they would be true to him or not. He projected his righteousness strongly at them and, whenever they disobeyed him, he reacted immediately, sending plagues and fires through their camps.

Now, however, God gave the nation forty years of unparalleled peace and prosperity. This time he let go of it, happy that the covenant he had made with Moses finally appeared to be working. His hopes for the nation had peaked and he allowed it to rejoice in its splendour. Even Israel's enemies were at peace with her. It was a golden age, a symbol of heavenly peace and glory to come. 'The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah' (*1 Kings* 10:27).

Unfortunately the honeymoon did not last long. Solomon failed to focus his faith in God and turned to material extravagance. He married foreign wives who introduced pagan customs to the nation. Solomon 'clung to these in love' (*1 Kings* 11:2). When he grew old his foreign wives 'turned away his heart after other gods; and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father' (*1 Kings* 11:4). After Solomon's death the nation soon divided in two as the people of Judah followed Rehoboam, Solomon's son, as their king while the northern tribes of Israel followed Jeroboam who placed two golden calves at Dan and Bethel to distract the people away from worshipping the Lord at Jerusalem. (*1 Kings* 12:28-29).

God said to Jeroboam: 'You have done evil above all that were before you and have gone and made for yourself other gods, and molten images, provoking me to anger, and have cast me behind your back' (*1 Kings* 14:8-9). A succession of evil kings led the tribes of Israel into every form of idolatry and wickedness. Judah's history was more chequered – some of its kings like Ahaz were as bad as the kings of Israel while others like Jehoshaphat kept the people true to God, but it was only a matter of time before Judah too fell away and angered God intensely.

His hopes for the nation had been shattered. His wrath became white-hot against it. He could have summarily called Israel and all the other nations of the world, who had long abandoned the worship of God, to a final day of judgment. But he didn't. The God of all faithfulness, whose love for his people had also reached a peak, a white-hot intensity of its own, weighed up the possibility of yet bringing his people into a deep personal relationship with him. He sought an alternative to judgment. What was he to do – judge or redeem? His burning love made him choose the latter, but not after considering very deeply what price he himself would have to pay to accomplish his purpose.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel: The Promise of a New Covenant

No less than 17 of the 39 books of the Jewish Scripture come from the time of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They lived about three centuries after Solomon and David. The writings of this time are, with the exception of the Book of Jonah, all prophetic works. They are full of prophecies about the future and focus on God's expanding revelation and the climax towards which it was heading. Some quotes from these books, however, show just how deep God's anger against his people was for consistently rejecting him at the time.

'My anger is hot against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders,' God declared (*Zechariah 10:3*). Again he cried out: 'Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me. I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me' (*Hosea 7:13*). Yet again he exclaimed: 'I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins,' adding 'I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies' (*Amos 5:12,21*).

Yet it was not just hot anger that moved God to speak so forcibly, it was also a deep grief that the nation he had chosen and loved from the depth of his being had so coldly chosen to brush him aside as we see in this passage: 'Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season, I saw your fathers. But they came to Baal-peor, and consecrated themselves to Baal, and became detestable like the thing they loved' (*Hosea 9:10*). Therefore God proclaimed: 'Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more, all their princes are rebels' (*Hosea 9:15*).

But between these quotes, which are only a selection of a number of condemnatory exclamations, come an abundance of similar texts where God declares his burning love for his people and his desire for their redemption. 'I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back because I have compassion on them, and they shall be as though I had not rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer them' (*Zechariah 10:6*). Again he declared: 'My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy' (*Hosea 11:8-9*). Many others show how God's emotions at the depth of his heart had intensified within him. He loved his people and his compassion for them had reached a defining stage, but his wrath and anger against their coldness of heart had also reached their zenith.

It was not just a simple matter of tossing a coin and choosing which would prevail. Throughout the Bible one finds that God's attitude to sin is absolute. He does not regard the sins that men commit as nothing more than acts of wrongdoing, oversights, mistakes or errors of judgment that can easily be forgiven. They confront and offend his holiness. From the time Adam and Eve first rebelled against him God has treated human sinfulness as a *rebellious condition*. It shows that humans do not truly love him, that their hearts are cold towards him, and that they do not care to enter into a close relationship with him where his Spirit is free to search their innermost beings and cleanse their souls. Pious observance of fixed prayer-times, regulated fasting, formal recognition of outward rituals and ceremonies do not and cannot compensate for a heart that is cold towards him. Nor are these observances proof of an obedience that comes from the heart.

The 17 books written at this crucial juncture of Israel's history show just how God feels about human sinfulness. Here is God's basic assessment of the human condition from one of them: 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt; who can understand it? I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings' (*Jeremiah 17:9-10*). Two other quotes from books written at this time define God's perfect holiness and show why sin angers him and is not easily forgiven: 'the Holy God shows himself holy in righteousness' (*Isaiah 5:16*) and 'your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing' (*Habakkuk 1:13*).

The Bible shows that although God has many attributes (such as those mentioned in the 99 names of God in Islam), two are paramount. By nature he is *righteous*, it is the basic facet of his being. Sinful acts and attitudes confront that righteousness and, as numerous records in the early days of God's relationship with man show, awful judgments can follow. Satan and his fallen angels were cast into pits of gloom never to be forgiven or delivered (*2 Peter 2:4*), every first-born son in Egypt was slain in a single night because of the nation's resistance to God (*Exodus 12:29*), while numerous Israelites perished in the wilderness whenever they opposed Moses and defied the Lord (*Numbers 11:33, 16:35*).

The second great virtue in God's character is his *love* which is so deeply ingrained at the depth of his being that the Bible simply declares 'God is love' (1 John 4:8). But whereas his righteousness is at the forefront of his being and was quickly thrust in the face of those who defied him in those earlier times, his love appears to have taken time to develop, grow and rise from the deepest recesses of his being. It wasn't a natural affection for his people, it was a deepening desire for their best welfare *in spite of* their hostility towards him. It was a strengthening love for a world that was consistently proving to be decidedly *unlovable*. By the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel it had reached its zenith and, although God could justifiably have called all mankind to judgment because of its sinfulness, he chose rather to express the fullness of his love towards it, making one decisive and definitive statement which was to shape his attitude to the human race for the rest of its days: 'I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you' (Jeremiah 31:3). After intense reflection and inner resolve he decided to press on and almost immediately declared how he planned to change the God-man relationship completely and bring the two together in a wonderful new way, uniting them in perfect fellowship, goodwill, personal knowledge and mutual companionship.

God declared: 'Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a *new* covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, *not* like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But *this* is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law *within* them, and I will write it upon their *hearts*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying 'Know the Lord', for they shall *all know me*, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will *forgive* their iniquity, and I will remember their sin *no more*' (Jeremiah 31:31-34 – emphasis added).

This promise was unprecedented – God giving his people a divine motivation and power from within to keep his holy laws, opening the door for all his people to know him personally, and guaranteeing to forgive all their sins right here and now. And this wasn't all. Through the prophet Ezekiel God went on: 'A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances' (Ezekiel 36:26-27), adding: 'I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God' (Ezekiel 37:23). Unlike the first covenant, where God had commanded his people consistently "You shall" and "You shall not", placing the obligation on them to obey him unreservedly, he now consistently declared "I will, I will, I will", *thereby placing on himself the obligation to ensure that his people would respond faithfully to him*. True Faith had reached its peak. God's faithfulness was going as far as it possibly could – *guaranteeing* the faith of those who were willing to walk through his open door into a deep personal relationship with him.

The angels of heaven must have wondered, however, how he proposed to reconcile this open invitation with his perfect righteousness which would instinctively keep sinners at bay. How could absolute righteousness finally give way to perfect grace and mercy? How could God possibly introduce a new golden age in which his people, sinners to the core, could nevertheless be so forgiven that they could live in a perfectly holy relationship with him right now and know him from the depth of their beings? In short, how could God's Holy Spirit live comfortably in unholy human hearts? God gave them the answer: 'Behold I will bring my servant the Branch ... I will remove the guilt of this land *in a single day*' (Zechariah 3:8-9 – emphasis added).

For centuries he had longed for his people to respond to him, to draw close to him and to obey his commandments from the depths of their hearts. But as their resistance increased, so his love grew until it went far beyond just wanting a more intimate communion with them than a master-to-servant relationship. God knew that the only way he could ever bridge the gap between his all-holy character and unholy human sinfulness would be for *him* to pay the price we should pay to satisfy his wrath and vindicate his righteousness. He promised to send a deliverer, whom he called the Branch, who would bring redemption for the human race in less than a day. But it was obvious this deliverer would have to come *from his own being* if he was to fully pay the supreme price required to secure the forgiveness of God's people and to do it in only a few hours.

God fell back on his promise to David that he would give him a son who would rule over his kingdom for ever. Remember that God said 'I will be his Father and he shall be *my Son*' (2 Samuel 7:14). Also remember what was pointed out earlier – this does not come from an original Christian text, it is found in the *Jewish Scriptures*

written many centuries before the Christian era. The important thing here is that God was willing to give his own Son to achieve his supreme goal – the complete acquittal of all who would believe in him for the forgiveness of their sins and, with it, the free gift of eternal life. What we see here is God's ultimate purpose – *to engage man in the closest possible relationship* – and what he was prepared to do to achieve this. In short, God was willing to send his own Son for the salvation of the world so that we might no longer be unworthy servants but become the redeemed children of God and heirs to his everlasting kingdom. God was willing to enter the darkest recesses of the human world so that we might behold his glorious light.

After going through what must have been an extremely painful experience when deciding to tear his heart apart to redeem us, God allowed himself a brief moment to savour and relish its eventual outcome. With great joy and tangible relief he declared: 'And they *shall* be my people, and I *will* be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me. I will rejoice in doing them good, and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness, with *all my heart and all my soul*' (*Jeremiah 33:38-41* – emphasis added). He went on to affirm the complete forgiveness of all their sins so that they might know him personally and live with great joy to his praise and glory: 'I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me' (*Jeremiah 33:8*). We move on to the glorious new covenant age God had promised.

Jesus Christ: Son of David, Son of Abraham

Christianity has the most pessimistic view of what human beings are by nature – bound in sin and slaves to it to such an extent that they cannot acquit themselves – but it also has the most optimistic view of what men and women can become – sons and daughters of God, born of his Holy Spirit, transformed into his personal image, and generating his glory for all eternity. Yet, when God's supreme deliverer came to achieve this, he was missed by his own people and his mission is still overlooked and rejected by countless millions down to the present day.

The 17 prophetic works written at the time when God promised the new covenant climaxed the revelations of God to the Jewish people. The promise of a coming Messiah, a deliverer, was to be their final and supreme hope as God's purposes for the human race would be concluded. After these books no new ones followed. All went quiet for about four hundred years. By the time Jesus was born the nation of Israel had feverish Messianic expectations. A similar period of silence, also just over four hundred years, had followed God's promises to Abraham before the first covenant had been introduced through Moses. The time for the new covenant to be enacted had surely come. Israel waited anxiously and – correctly, as it turned out – expected the Messiah to appear at that time. Yet, when he came, only a relatively few recognised him while the nation as a whole overlooked him and, worse still, opposed and rejected him.

God had promised David a son who would rule over his kingdom for ever. When Jesus one day asked the Jews: 'What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?' they replied 'the Son of David' (*Matthew 22:42*). Solomon, David's immediate son, had been Israel's most prosperous and powerful king. In his day Israel ruled its surrounding world. Peace prevailed. The nation now longed for a new king who would introduce a similar reign and one which would never pass away. They expected their Messiah-king to make the Jewish nation the most powerful and affluent on earth. But they had missed one crucial point – and they had no excuses for their oversight. God had promised *another* patriarch a son long before the time of David and Solomon who was also to prefigure a greater Son to come, and they should have paid most of their attention to *him*, for he was to appear first.

You don't have to look far into the Christian Scriptures (the New Testament) to find out who it was. Just read the first verse of its first book, the Gospel of Matthew. The opening text of the whole of the Christian Scriptures reads: 'The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham' (*Matthew 1:1*). It was *the Son of Abraham* whom they should have first anticipated. We looked at some length at the son God promised to Abraham, namely Isaac, the son of his wife Sarah. When Abraham took him up to Mount Moriah to sacrifice him, Isaac said to him 'Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?' (*Genesis 22:7*) Abraham replied 'God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son' (*Genesis 22:8*). The original Hebrew is more emphatic – it effectively says 'God will give *from himself* the lamb for a burnt offering.' Abraham was, in reality, saying to Isaac "my son, you are the offering, but take heart. You are only a type of

another yet to come. God will one day give *of himself* the true lamb as an offering.”

John the Baptist (*Yahya* in Islam), looking at Jesus as he walked one day, proclaimed “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (*John 1:29*), identifying the lamb of whom Abraham spoke. On another day Jesus himself said to the Jews who were arguing with him: ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad’ (*John 8:56*). He clearly had the moment in mind when Abraham had said ‘God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.’

Abraham foresaw the whole Christian Gospel. Isaac was born of the Spirit in unique circumstances, so Abraham knew God’s Son would be born uniquely too (Jesus was born of a virgin woman). Abraham planned to sacrifice Isaac, knowing the Son of God would be sacrificed as well. Abraham believed Isaac would rise from the dead. In so doing he foresaw the resurrection of the Son of God. No wonder we find it stated that the scripture ‘preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham’ (*Galatians 3:8*).

Whenever the following question is asked “what is the greatest gift God has ever given you to show his love for you?” some might say “my health”, others “my children” or yet others “he answered my prayers and helped me when I was in terrible trouble.” All these are good answers, they show the kindness of God in providing for us and caring for us. But none of them cost him anything, they are not evidences of any depth of love in his heart for us. But if he should give his Son to die for us so that we could receive eternal life as a gift, be forgiven of all our sins, and be able to know God personally, *it would be the greatest gift he could give because it would come at the greatest possible cost to him*. And this is exactly what happened when Jesus came into the world! As one of his most famous disciples, the apostle Paul, put it: ‘He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?’ (*Romans 8:32*)

This was the supreme price God was prepared to pay to gain the highest treasure he sought – a cleansed, forgiven people in whom his own Holy Spirit could always comfortably dwell. When Jesus died on the cross God’s wrath against the sins of all those who would fully believe in him was exhausted. The sin-holiness problem, which had caused such trauma during Moses’ time and in the generations to come, had been solved. The door was open for all those wonderful things God had promised through Jeremiah and Ezekiel to be fulfilled.

True Christian believers don’t just believe in God, they would have no special message for their fellow monotheist Muslims if they did. But they do have a *very* special message for all who dwell on earth including Muslims. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, fulfilled the hopes of all true believers when he laid down his life for their redemption. Abel sacrificed the blood of his lambs to symbolise his hope in God’s salvation to come. Abraham was prepared to sacrifice his son and share his blood as a shadow and token of God’s great love in being willing to do the same one day in return for him. Moses ordered every Israelite family to spread the shed blood of a lamb on their doorposts and lintels, symbolising the crucifixion of the Son of God to come for their *eternal* deliverance.

Our message to Muslims and all the world in consequence is this – in Jesus we have received the *salvation* of God, we have been given the full *forgiveness* of our sins, we have become the *children* of God, we have received the *Spirit* of God, we are heirs of the *kingdom* of God and, most importantly, we have come to *know* God as his saved, redeemed people.

When God spoke to Moses his face shone, reflecting the immediate presence of God before him and among his people. The glory of God was manifested in the first Jewish temple when Solomon dedicated it to God, again proving that God was *present* among his people in a very special way. But when Jesus, God’s Son, stood among his people, the manifestation reached a new dimension. He took three of his disciples up a mountain apart and was suddenly transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light (*Matthew 17:2*). This time the glory far exceeded its manifestations at the time of Moses and Solomon, but it went still further. Jesus *himself* was transfigured. The glory shone through him. He did not reflect it or behold it, *he generated it from within himself in awesome splendour*. When the Son of God took human form, God and man became united forever. We will soon see how, in eternity, the followers of Jesus too will generate the same glory from within themselves.

In all other monotheistic religions God’s image is much the same. He revealed his laws, summoned obedience from his servants, and folded his arms, watching and waiting to see what would follow. This is the Religion of

Cain and it breeds formal monotheism. But, in fulfilling the hopes of Abel, Abraham and Moses whom he was willing to call his friends, God stepped off his throne, unfolded his arms, spread them out over all the earth, humbled himself and visited our world, paying the supreme price to show his eternal, perfect love for us and give us the assurance of a glorious place in his heavenly kingdom.

The Jews missed the Son of Abraham. They could not see that the Messiah had to come as his son first, in complete humility, to be sacrificed for our redemption. Paul puts it in these words: 'Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (*Philippians 2:5-8*).

Prophecies to the sacrificial death of the Messiah abound in the Jewish Scriptures. Most were made through David and Isaiah centuries before Jesus came. Many predicted the circumstances of his death in fine detail (*Psalms 22:1-21, 69:1-29*) while others declared the purpose of his sacrifice – to redeem the world from its sinfulness – in explicit, unmistakable language (*Isaiah 53:1-12*). The prophets did not know precisely what they were predicting but knew it was for generations to come. As the apostle Peter put it: 'The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look' (*1 Peter 1:10-12*).

Many predictions of his reign in glory as the Son of David yet to come also fill the pages of the same scriptures. Sometimes predictions of the coming Messiah as the suffering son of Abraham were couched between others predicting his heavenly glory, so the Jews had no excuse. Here is a typical example: 'Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high (glorious son of David). As many were astonished at him – his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men (suffering son of Abraham) – so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him (glorious son of David); for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand' (*Isaiah 52:13-15*).

Having first shown how the greater son of Abraham, Jesus Christ, not only humbled himself but was even prepared to be humiliated through his death on a cross, Paul then concludes: 'Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus *every* knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and *every* tongue confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord* to the glory of God the Father' (*Philippians 2:9-11* – emphasis added).

Jesus gave the Jewish leaders of his time every indication of who he really was and that his coming had been clearly foretold. Moses wrote of him (*John 5:46*). Abraham rejoiced that he was to see his day (*John 8:56*). David, inspired by the Spirit, had called him his Lord (*Matthew 22:43*). They should have known and recognised him.

To his own disciples, however, on the night before his crucifixion Jesus said: 'Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you' (*John 15:13-15*). God's cycle was complete. He had called Abraham his friend. He had spoken face to face to Moses as a man speaks to his friend. So now Jesus was able to speak to all his disciples present as the true friends of God. His impending death and resurrection were to open the door, at last, for all God's people to know him personally, to be forgiven of their sins, to love him with all their hearts, and to eventually be glorified at his own level. It was what God had most deeply desired and for which he had endured so much.

The Holy Spirit: God's Indwelling Presence

After Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples on various occasions. On the fortieth day he ascended to heaven after first telling them 'Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until

you are clothed with power from on high' (*Luke 24:49*). He identified that power very clearly: 'Before many days you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit' (*Acts 1:5*). Ten days after his ascension, as the disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem, 'a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind' and suddenly 'they were all filled with the Holy Spirit' (*Acts 2:2-4*).

God's deepest desire, to enter into the closest possible relationship with his people, was fulfilled as his own Spirit came down on Jesus' disciples. It was the beginning of the golden new covenant age. God and man united to each other – for all eternity! The climax of his supreme goal had been reached. While Jesus, the Son of God, had walked in human form among the Israelites, God was present *with* his people in a personal way far more intense and intimate than it had ever been at the time of Moses. But now, as the Holy Spirit came to live in the hearts of God's people and to remain there until Jesus returns, God became present *in* his people, resident within the deepest recesses of their hearts.

True Christian believers, born of God's Spirit, *know God personally*. They allow his Spirit to search the depths of their hearts, to root out all dishonesty, arrogance, pride, lust, religious self-sufficiency and malice. They have an absolute assurance of eternal life. They know all their sins have already been forgiven. They love the Lord with all their hearts. They know that God is worthy of their deepest affections, having paid the supreme price to redeem them. As they behold that love, perfected in the sacrifice of *his* Son, they are free to love him with all their hearts, souls and minds. Nothing stands between them and the kingdom of heaven.

The apostle Paul addressed the first true Christian believers as follows: 'now that you have come to know God, or *rather to be known of God*' (*Galatians 4:9* – emphasis added). This clearly shows that it was God's good pleasure to open the door for him to be known and not some religious effort on any *man's* part that brought him into this position. You too can know God personally – if you are willing to commit yourself to Jesus Christ and receive the fullness of his salvation.

Abraham's faith, perfected in his willingness to sacrifice his son, was a wonderful reflection of God's own faithfulness. But God's gift of his Son as a sacrifice for our redemption, is the perfect proof of his intense love for us. 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins' (*1 John 9-10*).

Jesus said 'Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (*John 3:3*). That includes you. To be born of God's Spirit is the only way for any man, at any time, in any age, to be freed from his sins and become a citizen of heaven. True faith, the Faith of Abel, is the world's only true religion, if it can remotely be called a religion. In reality it is a *living* faith, a response to God's *faithfulness* finally and fully revealed in his salvation through Jesus Christ. Referring to God's declaration that Abraham was righteous in his sight purely because he had believed in his faithfulness, Paul says: 'But the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification' (*Romans 4:23-25*).

So Paul continues: 'Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (*2 Corinthians 5:17*). God's true people are those who have believed in Jesus, the Son of God, and have received his ultimate promise, the Spirit of God. Christians who read the Qur'an are often struck by the striking statements in the book that actually confirm this. The Qur'an comes tantalisingly close to acknowledging this revelation. Firstly, it says that an angel appeared to Jesus' mother and said to her: 'O Mary, surely Allah gives you good news of a word from him whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary' (*Surah 3:44*). In the original Arabic the key words are *kalimatim-minhu* "a word from him." Note the words *minhu* – 'from him' – meaning that Jesus came *from God himself* and was not just another ordinary human being.

In another passage the Qur'an says of true believers 'These are they into whose hearts He has impressed faith, and strengthened them with a Spirit from himself' (*Surah 58:22*). The key words here are very similar: 'a Spirit from him' – *ruhim-minhu*. It is uncanny to find the Qur'an confirming the core of the Christian Gospel. Jesus was the Word who came from God (*minhu* – 'from him'), and the Holy Spirit who followed is the Spirit who also came from God (*minhu* – 'from him'). The Qur'an emphatically states that these two persons came from God himself. It does not use this expression (*minhu*) for any other personality in a similar context.

The door is open for you to believe in God's Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and to enter into a personal relationship with him by receiving the Holy Spirit. All it requires is one supreme act of committed faith – believing in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour.

I have, in recent years, often asked Muslims three crucial questions. Firstly, *do you know God personally?* Have you come into the greatest of all relationships – a living, personal relationship with him? Secondly, *are your sins forgiven for his sake?* Have you been cleansed not only from the guilt of all your sins but also their power? Lastly, *do you love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength?* Do you have real evidence that God is truly to be loved, that he has done something outstanding to prove his love for you, and asks only that you respond to him in heartfelt love in return?

I have received a variety of answers to these questions, but a young Muslim woman recently gave me three answers that, in my view, correctly reflect the only real answers a Muslim can give according to Islamic theology. Firstly, she said: "According to Islam it is impossible to know God personally. You can believe in Allah, pray to him, worship him, but never know him." She went on: "it is also impossible to know you are forgiven of all your sins. You can pray for forgiveness, try to keep the laws of Allah, and hope in his mercy, but you can never know for sure in this life that you are forgiven." Lastly she said: "do I love God with all my heart? I've never really thought about that. I believe in him, I'm willing to serve him – but love him? That has never crossed my mind."

The good news is that all three are open to you. The true God broke down the barriers between him and sinful men and women when Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. The door was opened for all true believers to receive his Holy Spirit and live solely by faith in him (the Faith of Abel), rather than to try vainly to commend themselves to him by slavish adherence to fixed religious routines and rituals (the Religion of Cain). You *can* know God personally, you *can* be forgiven of all your sins, and you *can* love him with all your heart, soul and mind. These are the keys to eternal life.

Abraham's faith reflected God's faithfulness. It shone like the moon in response to the sun's light. But true believers can do far more than this. They can *generate* the love of God back to him in return. They will shine like little suns in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus said 'Then the righteous will shine *like the sun* in the kingdom of their Father' (*Matthew 13:43* – emphasis added). Angels will continue to reflect the glory of God when that day comes, but true Christian believers will *generate* it back to him. Angels are God's heavenly servants, but God's redeemed people on earth are his *sons and daughters*. They will manifest the very presence of the Holy Spirit within them. Their light will shine from within in pure, transparent splendour. No wonder Paul spoke of: 'what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' (*1 Corinthians 2:9*).

By faith in Jesus, and by that faith alone, you can become a true child of God, know him personally, be forgiven of all your sins, and become an heir of eternal life. Jesus said: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me' (*John 14:6*). All true Christian believers are assured: 'Without having seen him, you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls' (*1 Peter 1:8-9*).

The door is open for all human beings on earth, no matter what their backgrounds may be, in spite of all their sins and no matter how grievous they may be, to receive God's perfect mercy in this age of grace and become the heirs of his eternal kingdom.

As Jesus put it: 'I am the Door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture' (*John 10:9*). That door will remain open until he returns. It remains open to you.

Knowing God Personally

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Publisher:

Christian Resource Ministries

P.O. Box 1804, Benoni 1500
Republic of South Africa

Muhammad - The Prophet of Islam

by **John Gilchrist**

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Preface

Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 the Christian world has become increasingly conscious of Islam and the hundreds of millions of Muslims that exist all over the earth but especially in the lands of the Middle East, North Africa and parts of Asia. For the first time in at least four hundred years the Church has begun to take Islam seriously though the awareness has once again led unfortunately to a generally militant reaction. In the

early centuries the Muslim world was viewed as the greatest threat to Christendom and the Church's initial response was to send numerous Crusades to the Middle East with the sole aim of subduing the nations of that region and annihilating their inhabitants. The recent resurgence of Islam has not really been a change to the course of history but rather a return to the way things traditionally were, a back to "business as usual" as it were between two traditional foes.

The intervening centuries were characterised by a largely apathetic approach and the Muslim world was largely ignored by a Christian Church now assured that the so-called Saracens, Turks and Mahometans were no longer a serious threat. The Western world today, however, can no longer be defined as a realm where Christianity dominates and it is interesting to compare the attitude of modern secularists with conservative evangelicals towards Islam. Both seem to have very little sympathy with what appears to be a troublesome people with nothing to offer the modern age but hijackings, hostage crises, terrorism, fanatical fundamentalism and the like. There have been many scholars, however, who have endeavoured to study Islam objectively and the last two centuries have generally been the first in which a truly historical assessment of every facet of the Muslim heritage has been made.

There remains a third approach which the Church could adopt, namely to love the Muslims of the world with same kind of selfless love which Christians have experienced so graciously from God in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such a revolution is already taking place in many parts of the world where Christianity and Islam come face-to-face with each other. One of the central issues here must be a proper appraisal of Islam in every aspect of its heritage – its founder, its scripture, its history and its character. This book is the first in a series of four designed to present the real world of Islam before Christians seeking to know Muslims and witness meaningfully to them.

Muhammad, the founder of Islam, is the theme of this first volume. He has been variously regarded in Christian writings and historically his image has hardly been a positive one. The purpose here is not to reverse this image but rather to present him as impartially as possible, not glossing over aspects of his life that appear to be justifiably censurable but also not failing to give credit where this is due. The memory of Muhammad is at the centre of Muslim affections as much as anything else in Islam and unless his reputation is properly assessed and appreciated it is not likely that a Christian seeking to reach out to Muslims will easily gain a response from them. It is as true with the Gospel as with any other communication that one has to first earn the right to be heard before one can speak authoritatively. This series of books on Islam aims to inform Christians about the Prophet of Islam, his scripture the Qur'an, his religion and faith, and its heritage over many centuries as objectively as possible for this very purpose.

In this volume the presentation of Muhammad's course and his claim to be the recipient of divine revelation has often been described as Islam perceives it in the interest of getting as close to its spirit as one can. On such occasions the Muslim reader in particular should not presume that the writer is sympathetic with or agrees with the Muslim perspective.

It is assumed that the average reader will not know much about Islam and every attempt has been made to present a simple and factual account of each particular subject. No documentation or notation has been made here of the many books on the life of Muhammad which have been consulted in its preparation as the reader will in all probability have very little access to them. They have been listed in the bibliography at the end of the book and in each case the edition consulted is the one dated though, where the date of original publication is known, this is included in parentheses.

Every effort has been made, however, to base the presentation of Muhammad's life, character and his experiences on the earliest of Islamic sources. The scripture of Islam, *al-Qur'an*, is the obvious original source of his life but the book is not written in the style of an historical narrative and one has to turn to the earliest records of his life as they appear in the traditional writings of Islam for an overall perspective on his biography. Reference has been made here solely to the records that are presently available in English. The earliest accounts of his course appear in the three works of *Sirat* literature which outline his life in biographical form. Two have been translated into English and are widely quoted in the text.

The first and most famous is the *Sirat Rasulallah* ("The Life of the Messenger of Allah") of Ibn Ishaq. Only a later recension by Ibn Hisham survives and it is this work which is quoted. The other source is the *Kitab al-*

Tabaqat al-Kabir ("Book of the Major Classes") of Ibn Sa'd.

Neither of these carries the same weight or authority in the Muslim world as the great works of *Hadith* literature. There are six records here which are regarded as generally authentic records of Muhammad's life though their contents are not set out in biographical form as their compilers were more concerned about defining the basis of Islamic law and its heritage rather than simply outlining the course of Muhammad's life. The two greatest works were the *Sahih al-Bukhari* ("The Authentic Record of al-Bukhari") and the *Sahih Muslim* ("The Authentic Record of Imam Muslim"). A third has been translated into English, namely the *Sunan Abu Dawud* ("The Standard according to Abu Dawud") and these three works are frequently quoted throughout the book. Also mentioned is the legal volume known as the *Muwatta Imam Malik*, a volume compiled by one of the greatest of the early Muslim jurists.

The transliteration of Arabic words has been done as phonetically as possible, indicating the actual utterance of each word or clause in classical Arabic speech.

The photographs that accompany the text are all of works of art concentrating on events in Muhammad's life done by prominent Muslim artists over the centuries. In the history of Islam orthodox Muslims have often frowned severely on any form of human representation in Islamic art and these artists have often deferred to their scruples by representing the Prophet himself and sometimes his mother and other members of his close family without depicting their faces. The facial visage has simply been left uncompleted in white as a mark of respect though in many great works, as will be seen, the artist has readily portrayed it. Muslim readers who might object to such paintings are requested to bear in mind that they were all done by prestigious Muslim artists and are treasured as valuable expressions of the Islamic heritage in many parts of the Muslim world.

This book has been written mainly for Christians, however, as an introduction to the great Prophet of Islam. It covers the historical context in which he was born, his life, his personality, his experience of the revelation of a scripture, and his legend in the hearts of the Muslim masses. It should serve to provide the average Christian with an adequate basic knowledge of the founder of the Muslim faith.

Chapter One

The Prologue: Arabia Before Islam

1. PAGAN ARABIA IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES

ARABIA BEFORE MUHAMMAD

Very little is known about the land of Arabia before the rise of Islam. Historians took little notice of it and nothing came out of it to draw the attention of the known world to the Arab peoples. Its principle town was known as *Makkah* (Mecca), a settlement in the desert region near the Red Sea in the middle of the Arabian peninsula. It was primarily a commercial centre and numerous caravans went back and forth from the town to trade with other regions to the north.

The Arabs were split up into various tribes often in conflict with one another. At Mecca the *Quraysh* tribe was dominant, being divided into smaller groups such as the *Banu Hashim* (into which Muhammad was born) and the *Banu Umayya* (from which many of his fiercest enemies arose). There was no central rule in Arabia and, if one tribe was attacked by another, a custom prevailed that the injured tribe could accept a ransom for the loss of any member or attempt to take the life of a member of the offending tribe in retaliation. Daughters were regarded as a misfortune and many infant females were buried alive. If a son was born to a family there would be great celebrations but if the child was a girl its parents would conceal its birth as much as they could.

For four months of the year hostilities were traditionally suspended as pilgrims visited Mecca for the various fairs held annually to commemorate different idols worshipped by the Arabs and to give local poets (*shu'ara*) an opportunity to compete with one another. Poetry was a very popular art and many examples of pre-Islamic poetry have survived. A number of poets, however, were regarded as mentally imbalanced (*majnun*) and it was an insult to call a poet a *kahin* (soothsayer).

The Arabs were steeped in pagan idolatry and the adoration of stones, whether shapen into the form of idols or merely set up as they were, was common. Many were brought by tribesmen visiting the fairs to Mecca and occasionally were left in the *Ka`aba*, a cube-like structure in the centre of the town and the principal shrine of pagan Arab idolatry. Long before the advent of Islam Diodorus Siculus, a Roman historian, commented that there was in Arabia a temple greatly revered by the Arabs and it is probable that he had the *Ka`aba* in mind. Very few other records of Arabian religion exist, however, and it is from later Islamic sources that most of our knowledge today derives.

JAHLIYYA – THE TIMES OF IGNORANCE

Our limited knowledge of Arabia perhaps is indicative of a prevailing Arab ignorance about the outside world at the time. Christian and Jewish influences were found in many areas but on the whole pagan superstition and all the typical practices associated with idolatry were prevalent. Islam found a fertile soil into which it could establish its message of monotheism and its own unique character and it is not surprising to find Muslim historians speaking of those days as *Jahiliyya*, the "Times of Ignorance".

The *Ka`aba* was the great focal point and shrine of Arab paganism. Islamic tradition holds that it was originally built by Adam although the Qur'an states that its foundations were raised by Abraham and his son Ishmael (*Surah 2:127*). In the generations before Muhammad's prophetic career, however, it was the focal point of all Arabian idolatry. Of particular prominence was a black stone (*al-hajarul-aswad*) built into its north-east corner. Whether it was worshipped as an idol is not certain but its fame as the most significant part of the shrine has survived in the Islamic era and to this day Muslim pilgrims attempt to kiss it while walking around the *Ka`aba*.

Very near the *Ka`aba* were two small hills known as *as-Safa* and *al-Marwa*. On the first was a small idol known as *Isaf* and on the second was a similar deity known as *Na'ila*. Pagan Arabs used to touch these images during their pilgrimage rites and the legend behind them was that they were originally a man and woman from Jurhum who had cohabited in the *Ka`aba* and were turned into stones for their impudence. The ceremony of running between these two hills has prevailed in the Islamic pilgrimage despite its apparent pagan origin. The Qur'an justifies this practice, saying the two hills are among the "symbols of Allah" and that there is no sin in encompassing them (*Surah 2:158*). Today they are incorporated into the huge complex of the Great Mosque of Mecca which is built around the *Ka`aba*, the shrine now standing in an open courtyard.

PAGAN ARAB IDOLATRY

The Qur'an mentions a number of the idols revered by the Arabs but interestingly makes no mention of *Hubal*, said to have been the chief deity in the *Ka`aba*. The Quraysh attributed victory to Hubal when overcoming Muhammad's warriors at the Battle of Uhud of which more will be said later. His identity probably derives from Baal, the pagan deity to whom the Israelites were so often distracted and whose existence was challenged by Elijah on Mount Carmel. Hubal's image stood over a well in the hollow of the *Ka`aba* and was destroyed by Muhammad when he conquered Mecca towards the end of his life. A Nabatean inscription predating Islam still exists on which his name is inscribed and it is said that an image of the idol existed in carnelian with a golden hand attached after the original had broken off. The pagan Arabs are said to have consulted Hubal by divination with arrows.

Three feminine deities mentioned by name in the Qur'an were *al-Lat*, *al-Uzza* and *Manat* (*Surah 53:19*). *Al-Lat* belonged principally to the *Thaqif* tribe at at-Ta'if, a settlement to the east of Mecca, and a massive statue of the goddess was venerated in the town. When Muhammad set about destroying all the idols around Mecca the demise of this one alone brought cries of grief from her worshippers.

A certain `Amr b. Lu`ayy was said to have set up the image of *al-Uzza* at Nakhla, a village nearby, and her devotees did not consider themselves discharged from their pilgrimage to Mecca until they had made a circuit of her shrine as well. *Manat* was worshipped by the *Aus* and *Khazraj* tribes to the north of Mecca at a town called *Yathrib*, later to be known as *al-Madina* (Medina) when Muhammad became the leader of the peoples there and converted these two tribes to Islam. The same `Amr set up an image of *Manat* at Qudayd on the shore of the Red Sea and pilgrims to Mecca who revered her would not shave their heads until they had paid their respects to her shrine as well. `Amr b. Lu`ayy is also said to have erected an image of Hubal in the *Ka`aba*, having obtained it during one of his journeys to Syria.

These three feminine deities were apparently believed to be the "daughters of Allah", the Supreme Being to whom the Ka`aba is today dedicated (being known as *baitullah*, the "House of Allah"). The Qur'an ridicules the idea that Allah should have daughters while the pagan Arabs preferred to have sons as offspring (*Surahs 16:57, 52:39*). They were also believed to be intercessors with Allah.

The Qur'an recognises *Allah* alone as the Supreme Deity, the one and only Lord of all the worlds. The worship of Allah was known before the advent of Islam as the Qur'an itself shows. It speaks of the pagans as calling on Allah exclusively to protect them when they set sail in a boat but as being ungrateful to him when he delivers them safely to dry land, giving a share of their worship to other gods as well (*Surah 29:65*). On another occasion it states that they swear their strongest oaths by him (*Surah 6:109*). No record of an image of Allah exists and, although some writers have tried to identify Allah with other Arabian gods, no real evidence exists to support the theory.

It appears that the acknowledgement of one Supreme Being, the unseen ruler of the universe, arose out of contact with Jews and Christians who settled in or passed through Arabia. It is known that the Christian Syriac name for God was *Alaha* and it is thought that it may have been derived from the Hebrew *Elohim*. It is quite possible that the name Allah came from this Syriac title, especially as Christian Arabs have also always used the name Allah for God and still do to this day.

Others have suggested that the name derives from *al-ilah* meaning "the god". There is nothing in pre-Islamic history to give credence to this idea, however. Whatever the origin of the Arabic word it is used in the Qur'an as an actual name for God and not as a neutral title for a single deity. It is thus the equivalent of Yahweh in Old Testament times. The absolute unity of Allah is the central theme of the Qur'an and is summed up in the fundamental declaration of Islamic faith, *La ilaha illallah* – "there is no god but Allah" (cf. *Surah 9:31*).

Arabia was a land of warring tribes who nevertheless had certain unwritten laws determining their interactions with one another. One's prime loyalty was to one's family or tribe and the honour of each had to be preserved at all costs. Islam was destined to shatter many of the traditions held dear for generations before it and the loyalty of a Muslim to Allah and the Islamic faith over and above family loyalties became one of these changes to the consternation of the pagan Arabs. Nonetheless the major characteristic of pre-Islamic Arabia that Muhammad's course was destined to challenge most severely was the veneration of countless idols and images representing the gods of the common people.

2. CHRISTIAN AND JEWISH INFLUENCES

JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN ARABIA

Although idolatry was prevalent in Arabia the two major monotheistic religions Judaism and Christianity had penetrated the peninsula and their influence was destined to have a considerable effect on the development of Islam.

The Qur'an pays more attention to Judaism than to Christianity. There were a number of Jewish tribes scattered in the regions north of Mecca. Around Yathrib three Jewish communities were settled in their own quarters, namely the *Banu Qaynuqa*, *Banu Nadhir* and the *Banu Quraydhah*. Muhammad was destined to confront each of these in turn once he had become the leader of the Muslims in the city. Although the Arabs at Mecca had probably had some contact with Jews there are no reliable records of any Jews settled there. Most of them appear to have been resident in the northern regions and, as many trading caravans from Mecca passed through their territories, it is probable that a familiarity with Judaism arose through such contacts.

It is not known whether these Jews were direct descendants of communities scattered throughout the region at the time of the *diaspora* or whether they were predominantly Arab converts to Judaism but it is generally presumed that the latter was the case. In southern Arabia, however, historical records indicate that a remarkable assertion of Judaism over Christianity took place not long before the time of Muhammad.

A Yemenite ruler had adopted the Jewish faith and set about severely persecuting the Christians in the region. Known as Dhu Nuwas ("the one with the curly hair"), he attacked the Christian community at Najran and, finding no way to subdue the settlement forcefully, he promised its inhabitants that they would be spared and

would be free to profess their faith if they surrendered peacefully. On gaining control, however, his army plundered the area and large pits were dug and filled with burning fuel. All who refused to convert to Judaism were condemned to be consumed by the flames and Arab historians confirm that many thousands perished. Not long after this, however, he was overthrown by an expeditionary force led by a certain Aryat from Christian Abyssinia. The incident is a unique example of Jewish aggression and supremacy in the Arabian peninsula.

CHRISTIANITY IN PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

For many centuries Christianity had been established in Egypt and Syria and, although it had never really had the same success in Arabia except for the community of Christians at Najran in the south, its presence was also destined to influence the development of Islam. It was not traditional Christianity that prevailed in the region, however, but two sectarian forms that for many generations had bitterly opposed each other.

A Christian leader known as Nestorius had some centuries earlier taught that Christ had had two distinct natures, one human and the other divine. The human Christ was an ordinary human being upon whom the divine Christ had been imposed at the time of his baptism. It was only the human Christ who had died at Calvary, the divine Christ having left his person and returned to heaven. At the First Council of Ephesus in 431 AD Nestorius was denounced as a heretic but his teachings took root among the Christians settled in the regions dominated by the Persians and the Nestorian Church was established there during Muhammad's time.

A certain Famiyun, a Nestorian Christian from Syria, is credited with establishing the Christian community at Najran. He converted the people of the region during a sojourn in which he is said to have effectively cursed a palm-tree which had previously been worshipped by the people. They had an annual festival in which a whole day was devoted to veneration of the tree with jewels and fine garments being placed on it. At Famiyun's command in the name of the Christian God the tree was suddenly torn from its roots and the onlookers, amazed at the sight, adopted Christianity. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.16).

Another oriental Christian named Eutyches is credited with asserting the other sectarian conviction in the region. In 488 AD he boldly attacked Nestorian beliefs, declaring that there was only one nature in the person of Christ, namely the divine. Christ was God bearing a human form on earth but not made of flesh and blood as other humans are. The Monophysite sect was established on this doctrine and it gradually became the dominant form of Arabian Christianity. It was prevalent in Egypt and, by the time of Muhammad, it was entrenched at Hira and in the Syrian regions immediately to the north of the Arabian peninsula. Despite the Nestorian origin of the Christian community at Najran it was decidedly Monophysite in conviction by the time Muhammad began to preach in Mecca. Abyssinia was by this time also one of the strongholds of the Christian faith in the region and here too we find the Monophysite faith predominant.

The Christianity Muhammad was destined to encounter was not to be the established catholic faith but a somewhat confused sectarian group of differing beliefs whose adherents were often strongly opposed to one another. Numerous other sects were scattered throughout the region, all holding a succession of differing beliefs about the nature of God and the composition of the divine Trinity. All these were destined to affect the development of Islam and it is interesting to find that the Christianity assessed in the Qur'an is not the pristine faith of the New Testament rather the distorted versions of it found in the churches around Arabia.

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES UPON EARLY ISLAM

Muhammad claimed that the Qur'an was a revelation given to him from heaven but many of its teachings show a somewhat obvious dependence on the Christianity of pre-Islamic Arabia. In fact there is nothing in the Qur'an which is genuinely original or which cannot be shown to have parallels in the varying religious convictions found throughout the region. He was exposed on an annual basis to the hordes of pilgrims who came to the fairs at Mecca which made the town a receptacle for all kinds of floating knowledge. Muhammad appears to have absorbed and retained within his memory as much of this as he could. A study of the teaching of the Qur'an shows the Prophet of Islam to have been more familiar with Jewish rabbinical works and apocryphal Christian writings than the contents of the Old and New Testaments.

A little-known book titled *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy* (because the only manuscripts of the book are in Arabic) makes Jesus speak from the cradle, a phenomenon repeated in the Qur'an (*Surah 19:29-30*), while *The Gospel of Thomas*, another apocryphal composition of which a Syriac version was known to exist prior to

Muhammad's time, records other miraculous works of Jesus repeated in the Qur'an, such as the creation of clay birds which came to life at his command (*Surah 3:49*).

Although the common Christian Arabic name for Jesus has always been *Yasu`*, derived from the original Hebrew *Yashua*, the Qur'an uses the name *`Isa*, obtained most probably from the Nestorian *Isho*. There are no other records anywhere in Christian history to possibly suggest the strange name for Jesus in the Qur'an. As Arabic is a Semitic language closely allied to Hebrew one would have expected his name to have been the same *Yasu`* as the Christians used. In fact the full Nestorian Syriac title for Jesus was *Isho Mshiha*, "Jesus Messiah", and it is interesting to find that the most common Qur'anic title for him is very similar, namely *al-Masih* *`Isa* (*Surah 3:45*).

Muhammad was well acquainted with the Christians of Najran. A delegation is said to have come on one occasion from the settlement to meet him and question him on certain points of his teaching about the Christian faith which perplexed them. Even before his prophetic mission, however, we find that he joined the Christians who visited `Okadh, a meeting-point between Mecca and at-Ta`if, and listened to the Bishop of Najran, Al-Qass ibn Sa`ida, whose eloquent preaching against wealth is recorded in poetic forms very similar to Qur'anic passages on the same subject. In later years Muhammad remembered Qass preaching from his brown camel and used to ask Abu Bakr, his close companion, to recite some of his lyrics.

Some centuries before Muhammad's time a certain Mani had proclaimed himself to be divinely inspired and claimed that he was the Comforter foretold by Jesus (*John 14:16*), a claim paralleled in the Qur'an for Muhammad (*Surah 7:157, 61:6*) and by his followers to this day. Mani also claimed that Jesus himself was not crucified but only a semblance of him being in fact the Antichrist, another teaching which has parallels in the Qur'an (*Surah 4:157*).

One of Muhammad's early contacts was a man named Waraqa, a relative of his first wife Khadija and a Christian. He is said to have translated a portion of one of the Gospels into Syriac and it must be presumed that he too would have introduced Muhammad to much of the local Christian heritage.

Although pre-Islamic Arabia was mainly pagan with only a limited Christian influence, there is much evidence that this influence grew as Muhammad's mission developed. It is probable that there was very little Christian influence upon Muhammad in the earlier years of his mission as the initial chapters of the Qur'an make no specific mention of the Christian faith, yet a study of the later surahs shows that, as his contacts with Christians increased, in particular with those in southern Syria, so the Qur'an's dependence on local Christian characteristics grew as well.

3. ABRAHA AND THE YEAR OF THE ELEPHANT

THE CHRISTIAN KING OF ABYSSINIA

An event that took place near Mecca not long before the rise of Islam has to be included in any assessment of the environment in which Muhammad founded the new faith. After the demise of Dhu Nuwas the king of Abyssinia, Abraha, decided to make the Christian faith dominant in southern Arabia and he had a fine cathedral built at San`a to which he hoped to draw all the Arabs as pilgrims. The city survives to this day in what is now Yemen, though the church he built has long since vanished.

Abraha, although a determined warrior, had a good reputation in the region. He was known to be a Christian of sincere conviction, indeed a very zealous one, and he was renowned for his keen sense of justice, his charitable nature and the manner in which he championed the cause of the poor and the unfortunate.

Nonetheless he was determined to make San`a the commercial centre of the Arabian peninsula and soon after the completion of his cathedral he issued a proclamation obliging all Arabs to visit it annually. He was well aware of the popularity of the Ka'aba in Mecca and he was fixed in his purpose to displace it as the commercial and religious centre of Arabia. His decree generally went unheeded, however, and the Christian King of Himyar watched with grief as the hordes of pilgrims set out each year for Mecca instead.

An independent record of his contests with the resident tribes in the area of the Yemen is introduced with an inscription introducing the name of the Triune God of the Christians in terms that show that the exact essence of

the Trinity was well-known to the Christians of Arabia, notwithstanding a misrepresentation of it in the Qur'an. A record of his management of the repairs to the dam of Marib in southern Arabia begins with these words: "By the power of the Merciful One (*Rhmn*), and His Messiah (*w-Mshhw*), and of the Holy Spirit (*rh quds*)". The Qur'an acknowledges Allah as *ar-Rahman* (*Surah 17:110*) and recognises Jesus as *al-Masih* (*Surah 4:171*), but it regards the Trinity as representing Allah, Jesus and his mother Mary (*Surah 5:78, 5:119*) while the holy spirit (*ruhul-quddus*) is identified as the medium of revelation (*Surah 16:102*), elsewhere said to be *Jibril*, the Angel Gabriel (*Surah 2:97*). The use of the

correct trinitarian formula in an Arabian inscription not long before the rise of Islam, however, shows that the Qur'an is not treating an error among the local Christians and its own misconception does tend to give the impression that the founder of Islam himself was in some confusion at this point.

ABRAHA'S MARCH ON THE KA'ABA AT MECCA

News came to the Christian king one day that a member of the tribe of Kenanah had entered his cathedral and had desecrated it by strewing animal dung all over its interior. Abraha was infuriated, more particularly when he heard that the tribes in the vicinity had revolted against his rule and had assassinated his ally Muhammad ibn Khuza'a, the king of Modar. So he decided to lead an expedition to Mecca with the sole purpose of destroying the Ka'aba.

A large contingent set out with numerous soldiers and horsemen. A unique feature of the army was the inclusion of an elephant among the other animals taken along, a circumstance which was later to give the year in which the march took place its name, the *Year of the Elephant*. (The actual year was 570 AD). When it reached Mughammis near Mecca, Abraha sent a contingent to the outskirts of the city and the soldiers plundered what they could including two hundred camels belonging to 'Abd al-Muttalib who was to become Muhammad's grandfather.

The Quraysh meanwhile decided it was useless to try to resist the large army and Abraha, sensing their unwillingness to engage him, sent a messenger to Mecca telling them he did not wish to fight anyone but sought only to destroy the Ka'aba. He summoned a representative to come out and meet him and 'Abd al-Muttalib duly went forth. When he arrived he demanded that his camels be returned to him. Abraha was surprised that he should only be concerned about his animals when the centre of his religious faith was about to be eliminated but the Arab retorted that, while the camels were his concern, the Lord of the Ka'aba would look after his own house and would defend it against him.

Abraha returned the camels and set out for the Ka'aba. The Quraysh decided to withdraw to the hills around the town after 'Abd al-Muttalib had first taken hold of the metal ring in the door of the shrine and had prayed to Allah to protect it. Meanwhile the elephant was brought to the front of the army and was decked in festive apparel. The guide of the procession marching on Mecca, one Nufayl, was very reluctant

to proceed with the journey and in a whispered but emphatic voice he commanded the elephant to kneel. He had learnt the words of command which the beast had been trained to understand and caused it to go down on its knees and refuse to march any further. Abraha was annoyed but no matter how hard he tried to persuade it to rise and press on with his army the elephant would not march on the city.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ABRAHA'S ARMY

It is not known exactly how the army came to grief but something dramatic appears to have happened to it to cause it to be decimated and give up the march on Mecca. A logical explanation can be given in that, as the Quraysh were occupying the hills, they may have rained down stones and rocks on the exposed force and obliged it to withdraw. An outbreak of smallpox or some other plague could likewise have caused Abraha to pull back without accomplishing his goal. A legend soon grew, however, that the army had been beaten back miraculously by a flock of birds which hurled down rocks and stones upon the soldiers. A record of this is found in the Qur'an itself in the following chapter:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant? Did he not make their guile go astray? And he sent against them flights of birds, hurling against them stones of baked clay, and he made them like green stalks that have been consumed. *Surah*

The traditional story of this event describes these unique birds as about the size of a swallow with green plumage and yellow beaks. Each one is said to have had three pebbles, one in its beak and one each in its claws, and as they pelted the army hundreds perished as the pebbles, hurled with an unbelievable ferocity, pierced the soldiers' coats of mail and found their mark. The rest of the army returned to Yemen and many others died on the way (giving the impression that it was most probably an outbreak of a disease such as small-pox that caused the catastrophe). Abraha himself died not long after returning to San`a and no further excursions from the city were undertaken.

The Qur'an, however, takes the legend at face value. The deliverance of the Ka`aba was obviously regarded by the Arabs as a miracle and a sign that the shrine had a divinely sanctioned significance. It is interesting to note that the Qur'an elsewhere describes the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in much the same way, saying that they too were assailed with "stones of baked clay" (*hijaratam-min sijil* – *Surah 15:74*).

The sanctity of the Ka`aba, both prior to Islam and within its realm, is in no small measure the result of this incident. During his lifetime Muhammad always regarded it as a genuinely holy shrine despite the fact that it was surrounded by idols. The very sequel of an Arabian prophet may well have had some connection with this event, creating as it did a sense of divine protection upon the city of Mecca.

Two other factors may also assist in determining why that claimant to universal prophethood should have been Muhammad himself. Firstly it was his own grandfather who took the lead and initiative in opposing the Abyssinian ruler and in assuring him that the Lord of the Ka`aba would look after his own house just as the Arab chieftain had seen to his. Secondly it has always been believed by Muslim historians that Muhammad himself was born in 570 AD, the very Year of the Elephant, and it has been customary for Muslims throughout the history of Islam to regard the destruction of Abraha's army as a sign of the imminent rise of a final messenger who would withstand all the attempts of pagans and unbelievers to destroy the ultimate revelation of God which would be given to him through the mediation of a divinely-inspired scripture.

It is not known for certain when Muhammad was actually born but there can be no doubt of his lineage and the place of his birth. He was born in Mecca of two members of the *Banu Hashim*, `Abdallah and his wife Amina. His father died shortly before he was born though his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib lived on for some years and was the young boy's official protector. Amina died six years after his birth, leaving the young Muhammad an orphan but one who was destined to transform the religious and social characteristics of his people and to eventually become the founder of the only major world religion to succeed the Christian faith.

4. MUHAMMAD'S FIRST FORTY YEARS

THE CHILDHOOD YEARS OF THE FUTURE PROPHET

As Muhammad's father `Abdullah had died before he was born his grandfather `Abd al-Muttalib became his guardian according to Arab custom. His mother Amina decided to send him away to be nursed by a woman from one of the local nomadic tribes of the Hawazin known as the *Banu Sa`d*. A number of possible maids turned down the opportunity as they did not expect a reasonable remuneration from the widow but one of them, Halima, eventually took the infant Muhammad over. The women arranged for the child to be weaned over a period of two years but, when Halima endeavoured to return him after this period, Amina remarked that she did not think the climate of Mecca would be good for him and she accordingly arranged for a further two-year period during which Halima was to remain responsible for him.

Shortly before the end of this period a strange experience took place which greatly disturbed Halima and her husband. Muhammad was playing with their children among the cattle close to their settlement. He suddenly had an unusual fit and for a time went into an apparent trance. They were greatly troubled as it was commonly believed that such behaviour was a sign of the influence of an evil spirit and they decided to return the child to his mother immediately. With some difficulty Amina managed to get a report of what had happened and, after persuading them that the experience was nothing to be concerned about, they took the child back and kept him for one more year.

Islamic legend has invested this story with marvellous details. It is said that two angels actually visited the young Muhammad and, after cutting open his chest, they took out his heart and removed a black clot which they promptly threw away. After washing his heart and the inside of his chest, they sealed them both up again and left, saying that if he was to be weighed against the whole of his people, he would most certainly outweigh them all.

Ignoring the legendary narrative that has embellished the incident it appears that the young boy indeed suffered from strange physical experiences that were later to manifest themselves again when he believed he was the recipient of a divine revelation. They may well have been epileptic fits though nothing certain can be said about them.

`Abd al-Muttalib died when Muhammad was only eight years old and his uncle Abu Talib thereafter became his official protector. While he was still a boy Abu Talib decided to take him on a trading expedition to Syria. Islamic tradition states that when the caravan reached Busra a certain Christian monk named Bahira came out to greet the party. It is said that he was well-versed in the Christian faith and that he had gained most of his knowledge from a book which he had in his cell. Noticing that Muhammad seemed to fit the description of a last prophet to come whom Bahira eagerly awaited, he questioned him at some length and looked at his back to see if he could find a certain mark which was believed to be a sign of the seal of prophethood between his shoulders. Discovering it he called for Abu Talib and instructed him to look very carefully after the lad when he returned to Mecca as he was destined to have a great future. The monk is said to have particularly warned him to beware of the Jews.

The full story of this incident is supplemented with much fanciful legendary material but the event as a whole is regarded by the Muslims as a salutary witness to the growing future Prophet of Islam by a learned Christian and the legend about the seal of prophethood between his shoulders is a basic tenet of Muslim belief to this day.

HIS MARRIAGE TO THE WEALTHY KHADIJA

At the age of twenty-five Muhammad married for the first time. A widowed woman of substance and dignity named Khadija had heard of his trustworthiness (he was called *Al-Amin* – "the Faithful One" – by his associates) and employed him to look after her next trading expedition to Syria. He was accompanied by her son Maysara and when this young man gave a good report of Muhammad's conduct throughout the journey she sought his hand in marriage. It appears the proposal came from her side and, although she was already forty years of age, Muhammad accepted her offer of marriage and a lifelong relationship resulted.

Seven children were born of the marriage but their three sons unfortunately died in infancy. Khadija was destined to die some ten years later but their four daughters all outlived her and followed Muhammad to Medina when he left Mecca shortly after her death. His daughters' names were Zaynab, Ruqayya, Umm Kulthum and Fatima though only the last was to become prominent in Islam as the wife of `Ali, one of Muhammad's first converts and his fourth official successor.

The marriage was a happy one and, although Muhammad married

often after Khadija's death and had a number of wives at any time, he maintained a monogamous marriage with her throughout the remaining years of her life. His betrothal to a wealthy merchant-woman proved to be an advantage to him when he began to reconsider the religious heritage of his people and his forefathers for he found ample leisure time to retreat to the hills around Mecca to quietly contemplate the meaning of life and to attempt to discover divine truths. An incident during this period, however, was destined to have a remarkable effect on him and probably contributed in no small measure to his eventual conviction that he was called to be a prophet of God in the line of the former prophets, firstly to his own people and ultimately to the whole world.

THE REBUILDING OF THE KA`ABA IN MECCA

At the age of thirty-five Muhammad one day walked into the Ka`aba precincts and was suddenly apprehended by large numbers of the Quraysh who were busy rebuilding the structure. They had not been willing to demolish the former shrine completely for fear of some reaction from the Arabian gods and goddesses and were keen to put a roof on it to protect its interior. A Greek ship had been wrecked fortuitously off Jiddah, the town on the Red Sea coast just forty miles from Mecca, and the Quraysh promptly arranged for its timbers to be transported to Mecca to be used as construction material.

The old structure was decrepit but the people withdrew from it in awe. One of them, al-Walid ibn al-Mughira, plucked up enough courage for the task, however, and plucked up an axe with which he demolished a part of it pleading with Allah all the while to recognise that the act was not intended to be sacrilegious but was necessary to improve the shrine. When the bystanders saw no evil befall him they joined in the task and, after the demolition work was completed, they set about rebuilding its walls without further ado.

The central feature of the Ka'aba was the black stone built into its north-east corner. Legend has it that the stone was originally pure white and that it was brought down from heaven by angels upon a cloth to Adam (or, as other traditions have it, to Abraham) to be inserted in the shrine. By Muhammad's time it was pitch black and it is said it turned this colour through bearing the sins of those who had kissed it. (It was in all probability a meteorite and was held in sacred awe solely because it had fallen from the sky. A similar stone held to be sacred in Paul's time at Ephesus also gained its sanctity through having fallen out of the sky – Acts 19:35). The Quraysh got to the point where the stone had to be replaced in its original position in the shrine.

The sub-tribes soon began to argue about who was to have the privilege of actually taking the stone and sealing it again in the walls. The dissension became so serious that one of the sub-tribes, the *Banu `Abdud- Dar*, brought a bowl full of blood and washed their hands in it with one of the other groups present, pledging a battle to the death to resolve the matter. The rest saw the issue was getting out of hand and, to solve the conflict, persuaded them to let the next person who came into the precincts have the honour of replacing the stone. Muhammad unwittingly became the very next person to come on the scene.

The first person to enter through the gate of Banu Shaybah was the Apostle Of Allah, may Allah bless him. When they saw him they said "This is Al-Amin (the Trusted). We agree to what we have decided". Then they informed him of the affair. Thereupon the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, took his mantle and spread it on the earth, then he put the black stone on it. He then said, "Let a person from every quarter of the Quraysh come ... let every one of you hold a corner of the cloth". Then all of them raised it and the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, put it in its place with his own hand. (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.166).

This story is almost certainly true in its essential details. It goes a long way to explaining why, shortly after this, Muhammad began to retire to the hill outside Mecca known as Hira where he meditated for long periods about the religious beliefs of his countrymen, the place of the Ka'aba in divine history, and his own personal role and destiny as a possible leader of his people.

Within seven years the otherwise ordinary citizen of Mecca was to boldly proclaim that he had been commissioned as a divine messenger by Allah, the Lord of the Ka'aba, to call the Arab peoples of the regions about Mecca to forsake the worship of idols and to revere Allah alone. There can be little doubt that the incident where he was elected to be the arbiter between the sub-tribes of Mecca in the matter of replacing the most sacred object in the Ka'aba had much to do with his later conviction and may well have been the express cause of his belief that he had been singled out as the divinely appointed warner and messenger to the very same people between whom he had mediated only a few years earlier.

Chapter Two

The Biography: The Life of Muhammad

1. THE PROPHET OF THE ARABS AT MECCA

MUHAMMAD'S CALL TO PROPHETHOOD

For a long time Muhammad had searched for the real purposes of life as he sat in the cave on Mount Hira. He thought seriously about the pagan practices of his countrymen and wondered about the divine realities beyond the world that he could see around him. Suddenly, one day, he had a strange experience that interrupted all his meditations and was destined to change his life forever. He saw a supernatural being in a vision in the sky above

him, standing on the horizon, with one foot above the other. He turned this way and that to get away from the unexpected apparition before him but, whichever way he turned, there was the being before him. The celestial vision overwhelmed him and the being spoke to him. What then happened is recorded in the following narrative:

There came to him the angel and said: recite, to which he replied: I am not lettered. He took hold of me (the Apostle said) and pressed me, till I was hard pressed; thereafter he left me off and said: Recite. I said, I am not lettered. He then again took hold of me and pressed me for the second time till I was hard pressed and then let me off and said: Recite, to which I replied: I am not lettered. He took hold of me and pressed me for the third time, till I was hard pressed and then let me go and said: Recite in the name of your Lord Who created, created man from a clot of blood. Recite, and your most bountiful Lord is He Who taught the use of the pen, taught man what he knew not. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.97)

Many years later the Qur'an identified this being who appeared to Muhammad as *Jibril*, the Angel Gabriel who had also appeared at the birth of Jesus to Joseph and Mary (*Surah 2:97*). This initial experience was to herald the beginning of a prophetic conviction that was to dominate Muhammad's personal course for years to come. He believed the angel had commissioned him as a prophet of Allah to convey the revelation of God's word to his people of which the short passage he had just received was to become the first portion to be revealed. It now forms the first five verses of Surah 96 in the Qur'an and for the next twenty-three years similar revelations were to be received which were to eventually become the book all Muslims revere as God's Word, namely *al-Qur'an*.

Muhammad was initially unconvinced by the vision and feared he had been visited by one of the *jinn*, demonic creatures which he had learnt inspired the poets who went before him until they became mentally twisted and possessed. Was he now to fall prey to their spells as well? His loyal wife Khadija comforted him, assuring him that his lord Allah would never desert him. Yet it took some years before he received another similar communication. Some three years later the vision occurred again:

Allah's Apostle said, 'I was in seclusion in the cave of Hira, and after I completed the limited period of my seclusion, I came down and heard a voice calling me. I looked to my right, but saw nothing. Then I looked up and saw something. So I went to Khadija and told her to wrap me up and pour cold water on me. So they wrapped me up and poured cold water on me'. Then was revealed 'O you, wrapped up! Arise and Warn'. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.417-418)

Muhammad had been sweating profusely after this second vision and Khadija gave him a blanket to relieve his fever. He was to receive no more visions like these but for the rest of his life similar communications were to continue in various forms and the Qur'an text was to grow in size and content. The first portion of this second vision now forms the first few verses of Surah 74. In a similar passage received shortly afterwards Allah comforts him by assuring him that he was ever near him notwithstanding any apparent delay in the communication of further revelations: "By the glorious morning light and by the night when it is still, your Guardian-Lord has not forsaken you, nor is He displeased. And truly the hereafter will be better for you than the present" (*Surah 93:1-4*).

From this time Muhammad entered the city of Mecca regularly to publicly proclaim that Allah alone was Lord and that the Arabs should turn from their idols and acknowledge Him alone. The Quraysh, however, were unconvinced that the ordinary local town-dweller they had known so well could be a messenger from God and they were even more incensed at his onslaught on their whole heritage and the implications this held for the future of their commercial trade with the other Arab tribes who regarded Mecca as the core of their traditional religious customs. It was not long before a confrontation ensued and Muhammad found himself severely opposed and gradually persecuted.

PROMINENT EARLY CONVERTS TO THE PROPHET'S MESSAGE

The very early passages in the Qur'an called on the new prophet to command the people to forsake idol-worship, to prepare for the Day of Reckoning, to choose between heaven and hell and to receive him as a prophet. Despite general rejection of his preaching his cousin `Ali and his adopted son Zaid ibn Haritha accepted his message and became his initial followers. The first outsider to do so was a prominent merchant named Abu Bakr who, upon Muhammad's death, was to become his first successor. He had always known Muhammad to be an upright and truthful man and believed his message was indeed ordained from above. He soon brought in a number of the

Quraysh to Muhammad's side and after a while the community of early followers was established. They would meet together regularly and listened intently to their new prophet's teachings, in particular the passages that were to form part of the Qur'an. At this time it was common practice simply to learn these portions off by heart and not much attention was given to writing down the text.

Persecution increased as the new mission grew, however, and two prominent men of the Quraysh being Abu Lahab, one of Muhammad's uncles, and Abu Jahl began to stir up the masses to pass scorn upon him. The protection of Abu Talib, however, prevented any actual injury to the prophet and most of the opposition took the form of ridicule and abuse. One of Muhammad's earliest companions, `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud, narrates an incident which typifies the kind of opposition he endured. While Muhammad was engaged in prayer with a number of friends behind him, Abu Jahl took the opportunity to revile him.

Abu Jahl said, referring to the she-camel that had been slaughtered the previous day: Who will rise to fetch the foetus of the she-camel of so and so, and place it between the shoulders of Muhammad when he goes down in prostration? The one most accursed among the people got up, brought the foetus and, when the Prophet (may peace be upon him) went down in prostration, placed it between his shoulders. Then they laughed at him and some of them leaned upon the others with laughter. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.986)

Muhammad's daughter Fatima removed the foetus and he himself promptly invoked imprecations on them in the name of Allah. Abu Lahab is denounced by name in the Qur'an and, together with his wife who used to place thorns in Muhammad's path, is assured that the burning flames of hellfire are to consume him (*Surah III:1-5*). Nonetheless persecution increased and a black follower from Abyssinia named Bilal was particularly severely treated by his master. He encouraged Muhammad, however, persuading him that the people of his country were God-fearing Christians and that his reception would be far better there. Muhammad accordingly sent as many of his companions as he could across to Abyssinia.

The Quraysh charged that many of the passages he was reciting were already familiar to them and were merely ancient folklore that he was pretending were divine in origin. They said, "This is nothing but a lie which he has forged and others have helped him with it"...and they say, "Fables of the ancients which he has caused to be written, and they are dictated to him morning and evening" (*Surah 25:4-5*). They asked why no riches had been sent to him if he were indeed a messenger of Allah (25:8), and why the whole Qur'an was not revealed to him at once (25:32). No real charge was brought against his teachings, however, and most of the opposition he faced in those early days took the form of mockery only.

He had some notable successes, however, in particular the conversions of his uncle Hamzah and a prominent Meccan leader `Umar ibn al-Khattab. Although only two years older than Muhammad Hamzah was a powerful man and, although he initially rejected his nephew's mission, he swore allegiance to it when he heard of the insults he was receiving from Abu Jahl (Hamzah actually struck him violently with a bow on hearing of such treatment when he returned from a hunting expedition).

`Umar was also given to forceful treatment of people he opposed. He was a strong opponent of Muhammad's cause and one day, while speaking out boldly against him, he was challenged by a friend Nu`aym ibn `Abdullah who teased him, asking how he could be so determined to destroy Muhammad's mission when his own house was divided against him. In fury he learnt that his sister Fatima and her husband Sa`id ibn Zayd had become the prophet's followers as well. He stormed into their house without knocking and heard a portion of the Qur'an being recited. He lost his temper and struck them both but, when he saw blood flowing from his sister's face, he relented and when he had calmed down he asked to hear a recitation of the Qur'an for himself. They brought out the manuscript from which they had been reading and, after reading it, he immediately sought for Muhammad and, finding him, fell at his feet and declared his allegiance.

Muhammad was very keen to reconcile his message to his own people and took no comfort from persecution or their rejection of his call. He was a pragmatic man throughout his life and sincerely wanted to get them on to his side. He found a way of doing so but one which was to cost him his credibility for a while.

THE INTERJECTION OF THE SATANIC VERSES

At about this time Muhammad was one day sitting among the pagan Quraysh near the Ka`aba and stood up and drew near to them. They then drew near to him and he recited the first part of what is now Surah 53 of the Qur'an

until he came to the words "Have you considered al-Lat and al-'Uzza and another, the third, Manat?" (*Surah 53:19-20*) whereupon he uttered the words "These are the exalted cranes (*gharaniq*) whose intercession is to be hoped for". He went on reciting the whole Surah and when he fell down in prostration, all the bystanders did the same. They were pleased with his utterance as it was basically a repetition of a pagan chorus which expressed the local belief that these three goddesses, Al-Lat, Al-'Uzza and Manat, were daughters of Allah and would intercede with them. They were likened to cranes which fly at a great height. They told Muhammad they accepted that Allah gives life and causes death and provides for all things and that this side of his teaching was no problem to them. Furthermore, as he had now spoken excellently of their goddesses, there was no further cause for division between them.

Muhammad had sought a point where he could be reconciled to them but, as he reflected on the incident, he realised he had in fact compromised the very core of his message, namely the absolute unity of Allah as the only God, and that evening *Jibril* is said to have come to him and told him to recite what he had read out that day. When he came to the passage about the intercessors, the Angel told him he had not revealed these words but they had been interjected by Satan. Muhammad was alarmed but he was comforted by the assurance that Satan was always trying to intercept God's revelations and was given the correct text of the verse which today reads, in place of the intercessory clause, "What! For you the male sex and for Him the female? This would be a most unfair division. These are nothing but names which you and your fathers have devised for which Allah has sent down no authority" (*Surah 53:21-23*). When Muhammad publicly corrected himself shortly afterwards, the hostility of the Quraysh grew ever stronger.

Muslim writers find this story unpalatable and every effort is made to discount its authenticity. There are a number of reasons why it is probably true in its essentials, however, in particular the fact that it is recorded in all the early biographies of Muhammad. It appears in the *Sirat* works of Al-Waqidi and Ibn Sa'd (*Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.237) and was also recorded by at-Tabari who stated that he got his information from Ibn Ishaq, the most famous of the biographers. The text does not appear in the later recension of Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasulallah* done by Ibn Hisham which is the only surviving record of his work but the redactor himself openly stated that he had deliberately expunged material he thought to be detrimental to Muhammad and this passage was almost certainly part of that material. It is known that the Muslims who had fled to Abyssinia returned to Mecca on hearing that Muhammad and the Quraysh had resolved their differences and that the latter had become Muslims, a fact Ibn Hisham admits (*Sirat Rasulallah*, p.167), but there is no explanation for this other than the story of the Satanic verses as we have it. On returning and finding things not so, the Muslims had to hastily depart for Abyssinia again.

Recently an ancient manuscript was discovered in the Qarawiyyin Mosque at Fez in Morocco titled *Kitab al-Maghazi* (Book of the Campaigns) which contains lectures given by Ibn Ishaq and the story is included in it. Two other facts strengthen the argument for the authenticity of the narrative. The Qur'an states in one place:

And we have sent before you no messenger or prophet but, as he recited, Satan suggested his own recitation. But Allah abolishes what Satan suggests and Allah continues his revelations, and Allah is Knowing, Wise. *Surah 22:52*

The great Muslim commentator on the Qur'an, Zamakhshari, openly interpreted this verse as referring to the occasion when Satan had substituted something in accordance with Muhammad's own wishes and at-Tabari plainly stated that this verse was revealed to Muhammad immediately after his lapse. In another passage in the Qur'an the prophet is told that his enemies had wanted to distract him from God's revelations by substituting in his name something else which, had he fallen for it, would have made him their friend, but God strengthened him and stopped him from inclining to their wishes (*Surah 17:73-74*). On this occasion we find Ibn Sa'd openly stating that these verses, too, were revealed to Muhammad immediately after the incident of the Satanic verses (op.cit., p.237). A tradition from al-Bukhari, the most renowned of the early Hadith scribes, also supports the story:

Narrated Ibn Abbas: The Prophet performed a prostration when he finished reciting Surat an-Najm, and all the Muslims and pagans and Jinns and human beings prostrated along with him. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.363)

The Surah referred to is the same Surah 53 and, had Muhammad not somehow recited something which appealed to the Quraysh (the text as it is in the Qur'an today is decidedly hostile towards their pagan beliefs about the

three goddesses), it is hard to see how the unanimous spirit of devotion was achieved. In his narrative Ibn Sa'd states that when they all prostrated, "Al-Walid ibn al-Mughirah, who was an old man and could not prostrate, took a handful of dust to his forehead and prostrated on it" (op.cit., p.237). This is hardly the sort of irrelevant information that a forger would care to include but is just the sort of exceptional conduct that an eye-witness would notice. There is enough evidence to suggest that the whole story must be true to some extent.

The whole event gives an insight into what had probably been a deep longing on Muhammad's part that his people should respond to his message. When he saw that the means he had used to bring this about had in fact required a compromise of his essential message, he risked even greater opposition to be true to his convictions. Never again did he give way to any inclination to question the absolute unity of Allah and to this extent he emerges from the whole affair with some credit.

ABYSSINIA AND THE BOYCOTT OF THE BANU HASHIM

The exiles of Muhammad's followers to Abyssinia were signs of the extent of persecution that the early Muslims were suffering in Arabia. It is interesting to find the emerging prophet sending his companions to a Christian country and the reception they received indicates that Muhammad was not at that time regarded as an enemy to Christianity. His attitude also shows that he too was quite magnanimous towards the Christian faith at this time. He described the country as one where a king ruled without injustice and a land of truthfulness and it was seen as the best place of refuge until the heat of persecution should abate.

When the Quraysh at Mecca heard of the emigration to Abyssinia they sent a delegation to the Negus (the king) carrying precious gifts in order to persuade him to extradite the Muslims under his care. The two leading envoys of the Quraysh, `Amr ibn al-`As and `Abdullah ibn Abu Rabi`ah, addressed the king, exhorting him to return the band of apostates from the traditions of their own forefathers so that they might be judged by their own people. He immediately called for the group of exiles and asked them what their religious beliefs were, in particular as they seemed to be different to any other known religion of the time.

Ja'far ibn Abu Talib replied that they had been a people steeped in ignorance and pagan idolatry with no stable system of government or social laws to moralise their behaviour. Then God sent among them a prophet from among their own people whose integrity was well-known to all. He had summoned them to abandon the lifeless images they had formerly been devoted to and to worship of Allah alone. The Negus then asked them to read something from the Qur'an as it then stood and, being aware of his Christian faith, they read him the passage from Surah 19:29-33 which described certain incidents pertaining to the birth of Jesus. On hearing it the king said he found no fault in it and the patriarchs of the local churches also expressed surprise at the passage (which, interestingly enough, has no Biblical parallel, describing as it does a miracle where Jesus is said to have spoken from his cradle while still an infant).

The Quraysh then charged that there was a darker side to the story and that Muhammad often spoke of Jesus in negative terms. When the Muslims were again permitted to speak, Ja'far stated that there was really no difference between Christian and Muslim beliefs about the son of Mary. He carefully avoided any mention of Muhammad's denial of the basic Christian belief in Jesus as the Son of God and said rather that their prophet preached only that Jesus is the servant of God (*`abdullah*) and his Spirit (*wa ruhun minhu*) and a prophet (*wa rasulullah*) and his Word (*wa kalimatuhu*) which he sent to Mary, the innocent virgin (cf. *Surah 4:171* where most of these titles appear).

The king then drew a line on the ground, saying that the difference between their respective faiths was no wider than it and he continued to give them sanctuary. Many of them did not return to Arabia until after Muhammad's emigration to Medina. Meanwhile persecution intensified at home. Finding no way to dispose of the menace of Muhammad and his preaching, the Quraysh decided on a total boycott of the whole quarter in the city occupied by the Banu Hashim. Though Abu Talib and most of the other tribe members were not committed to Muhammad, they nevertheless felt themselves bound by Arab tradition and customary tribal loyalties to defend him. This frustrated the Quraysh so they ordered a blockade of their quarter, posting the notice inside the Ka'aba.

For three years the sanctions against the Banu Hashim continued but they proved ineffective even though those held up in the area were severely deprived of food and sustenance. Some of the Quraysh became disturbed at the growing anguish of their fellow-men and two of them, Hisham ibn `Amr and Zuhayr ibn Muttalib, decided to

revoke the pact. The others, led by Muhammad's great enemy Abu Jahl, opposed them but when they discovered that termites had eaten away the notice in the Ka`aba, leaving only the words "In thy name, O Allah", they all agreed to revoke it. Not that this alleviated hostility between the Muslims and the rest of the Quraysh but Muhammad did find at last that he had some freedom to move about again. By this time, though, he had exhausted his hope that they would ever be converted by peaceful means and he began to look elsewhere for support and success, especially when his protector Abu Talib and his devoted wife Khadija died at much the same time.

MUHAMMAD'S FUTILE VISIT TO AT-TA`IF

At-Ta`if was a settlement about sixty miles south-east of Mecca where the Thaqif tribe had a great shrine built to the honour of the pagan goddess Al-Lat. Nonetheless Muhammad set out for the village, hoping that the response to his message here would be more favourable than that in Mecca. His first step was to call on the chiefs of the people and he summoned them to the worship of Allah alone and to submission to his will as revealed through the divine message of the Qur'an. They boldly rejected him, however, and sent him away.

One of them swore that he would tear up the covering of the Ka`ba if God had sent him. The other said, "Could not God have found someone better than you to send?" The third said "By God, don't let me ever speak to you. If you are an apostle from God as you say you are, you are far too important for me to reply to, and if you are lying against God, it is not right that I should speak to you". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.192)

Muhammad realised he would get no response from the rest of the people and he appealed to the chiefs to keep his visit to them secret, fearing that if the Quraysh at Mecca heard of his misfortune, they would be all the more emboldened against him. They gave him no quarter, however, and sent young louts and slaves to ridicule and pelt him with stones as he fled the village.

Islamic tradition states that the trip was not altogether futile as a young Christian slave named `Addas is said to have solaced him on his way back to Mecca and to have converted to the Muslim faith after a short discussion with him. Further on, when he reached Nakhlah, it is said that a number of the Jinns from Nasibin heard him praying that night and reciting the Qur'an and seven of them were immediately converted and went back to their own community to warn them of the coming judgment. As mentioned earlier, the *jinn* are believed to be invisible spirits made of fire, some of whom are thoroughly demonic while others are benevolent and Muslim at heart. The Qur'an apparently alludes to this in the following verse which Ibn Ishaq states refers specifically to the incident:

Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of Jinns have responded, they said, 'We have truly heard a wonderful recital'. *Surah 72:1*

Another passage is also said by Ibn Ishaq to refer to this incident and here it is said that after the Jinns had quietly listened to the recitation of the Qur'an, they summoned their people to believe in God who would forgive them their faults and save them from wrath (*Surah 46:29-32*). All this was unknown to Muhammad, however, and he returned unsuccessful to Mecca. At this stage his whole mission reached its lowest point. After some ten years of patient preaching the results were meagre and there appeared to be little hope of any change in the hearts of the pagan Arabs. Nonetheless he remained steadfast in his purpose, committing himself anew to Allah who had protected him all the way thus far and without whom there was no power, light or guidance. His fortunes, however, were about to change and shortly after his return to Mecca he searched for new communities to preach to and this time his hopes were to be realised.

2. AL-HIJRAH AND THE COMMENCEMENT OF ISLAM

THE TWO TREATIES OF `AQABAH

Not long after the unsuccessful visit to at-Ta`if the annual major pilgrimage to Mecca came round and Muhammad met with a delegation from Yathrib made up of prominent members of the Khazraj tribe. These men had apparently been warned by the Jews in the city that it would not be long before a prophet would arise who would destroy all who opposed him. The Jews had threatened the Arabs that this prophet would arise from among their own numbers but, when the delegation had a chance to hear Muhammad preach his own message, they were convinced that he was the prophet whose coming had been foretold. Seeking to anticipate the Jews

they swore their allegiance to him and returned to Yathrib, proclaiming that they had met with the new prophet to whom all the peoples of the city, both Aus and Khazraj, should commit themselves as his followers and disciples.

A year passed uneventfully but the delegation from the Khazraj at Yathrib had spread the message of the new prophet among their fellow citizens and twelve of them met with Muhammad during the next major pilgrimage. They told him of their successes in Yathrib and committed themselves to an oath to follow him and defend him with their lives. The oath became known as the First Pledge of `Aqabah, being named after the area outside Mecca where it took place. It was also known as the "Pledge of the Women" because they also undertook to observe the ordinances laid down in the Qur'an on believing women who sought to take the oath of fealty (*Surah 60:12*). One of the delegation from Yathrib put the substance of the oath in his own words, indicating their total commitment to the Prophet's cause which now became known as *al-Islam*, "the submission" to God and to his Prophet:

There were twelve of us and we pledged ourselves to the prophet after the manner of women of women and that was before war was enjoined, the undertaking being that we should associate nothing with God; we should not steal; we should not commit fornication; nor kill our offspring; we should not slander our neighbours; we should not disobey him in what was right; if we fulfilled this paradise would be ours; if we committed any of those sins it was for God to punish or forgive us as he pleased. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 199)

Muhammad was greatly encouraged by the response at Yathrib and he sent his companion Mus`ab ibn `Umayr to teach them the precepts of the growing revelation of the Qur'an and the fundamentals of Islam. When they reached the city they spread his teachings and the number of converts from both the Aus and the Khazraj multiplied considerably. In due course Mus`ab returned to Mecca and informed Muhammad of the growing strength of the Muslims in the city. He accordingly began to seriously think of emigrating from Mecca where opposition was as strenuous as it had ever been.

When the great annual pilgrimage came round again some seventy Muslims from Yathrib met with him again in the same region secretly and they took the second pledge of `Aqabah. On this occasion they pledged themselves to be his followers, to observe the commandments of Allah as revealed in the Qur'an, and to guard his life with their own lives. In return he pledged to leave Mecca and become their leader in Yathrib, henceforth to be known as Medina, the Prophet's city. Al Bara` ibn Ma`rur, the leader of the delegation who had converted to Islam a year earlier, confirmed their pledge to Muhammad in these words:

We have listened to what you have said: Had there been some other idea in our mind we would have expressed it. We mean to fulfil (our promises) and want truth, and we are ready to sacrifice our lives for the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.257)

The group had hoped that no one knew what was transpiring between them but someone from the Quraysh heard of their covenant and reported it early the next day to the leaders of the tribe. They immediately contacted the group of the Khazraj who had come down to Mecca for the pilgrimage and accused them of treacherously entering into a covenant with Muhammad against them. The majority of the Khazraj, however, knew nothing of the pact and they denied the charge. Before the Quraysh could gain any definite information of what exactly had taken place the fair was over and the Khazraj, including the contingent of Muhammad's followers, returned to Medina.

The Quraysh were nonetheless deeply disturbed to learn that Muhammad had finally succeeded in attracting a significant number of followers from another city and they took counsel among themselves to put an end to his mission once and for all before it gained further ground. For the first time they planned to kill him while he at the same time gave serious consideration to leaving the city. The struggle between them had finally reached a climax and a new era was about to dawn, one which would have lasting historical consequences.

AL-HIJRAH: THE EMIGRATION OF THE MUSLIMS TO MEDINA

In anticipation of his own move to Medina, Muhammad sent small bands of his followers ahead of him. He ordered them to leave in a series of insignificant groups of only two or three at a time so that the Quraysh would not be unduly alarmed. After a while it became obvious what was happening but the people of Mecca were uncertain whether Muhammad himself intended to leave. They had twice previously observed him sending out

his followers to Abyssinia without leaving the area himself and so they made no concrete plans to intercept him but secretly plotted to kill him at an opportune time.

In the end only Muhammad, Abu Bakr and a few other Muslims were left in the city. When he finally was persuaded that Allah was commanding him to go to Medina, he called Abu Bakr and told him to have two beasts ready for both of them to leave at an appointed time. On the actual night Muhammad arranged with his nephew `Ali to sleep in his bed in his stead and, although the Quraysh were carefully watching his house, they suspected nothing when they saw someone lying in the bed every time they looked in to see if Muhammad was still there. In the meantime Muhammad escaped with Abu Bakr to Mount Thaur which is south of the city, a clever move to mislead the Quraysh who immediately began searching for him north of the city once they discovered that he had eluded them. The two men hid in a cave and remained there two days until they were persuaded that the search for them was over.

In the cave Muhammad prayed continuously for deliverance while Abu Bakr kept a lookout for pursuers. In time some of the young men of the Quraysh reached the cave and began to look around it for any signs that the two men might have been there. Abu Bakr was greatly afraid that they would be discovered by the Quraysh but Muhammad encouraged him to remain steadfast. When Abu Bakr complained that there were only two of them against so many unbelievers, Muhammad replied that they were not two but three and that Allah would be their protector. The Qur'an records the exact words he used:

Allah did indeed help him when the Unbelievers drove him out: he had no more than one companion, they were only two in the cave, but he said to his companion, "Have no fear for Allah is with us". *Surah 9:40*

This was perhaps the greatest moment of trial of Muhammad's conviction that he was called as a prophet to lead his own people to the faith of the one God, Allah, and to a lifestyle of submission to his will. It is to his credit that he maintained his faith in such trying circumstances and in spite of the years of almost unrelenting opposition from his own people. Abu Bakr recorded the moment in these words:

"I was in the company of the Prophet in the cave, and on seeing the traces of the pagans, I said, 'O Allah's Apostle! If one of them should lift up his foot, he will see us'. He said, 'What do you think of two, the third of whom is Allah?'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.148)

Both of them then left the cave and escaped by the way of the Red Sea to Medina and `Ali soon followed. The Quraysh continued to search widely for them and one of them actually came upon Muhammad and Abu Bakr north of Medina but, although he was in a position to physically assail them both, he was overawed by Muhammad's presence and returned to Mecca by himself. The flight, known in Islam as *al-Hijrah*, ("the Emigration"), became the turning-point of his mission and the actual year from which the inception of Islam is dated. It was the year 622 AD and from the actual date of the Hijrah, the 22nd June, the Islamic calendar begins and continues so to this day. (It is a lunar calendar, however, and is about ten days shorter than the solar calendar of 365 days).

Islamic legend has invested the incident with a marvellous story about a spider which spun a web in front of the cave to deceive the Quraysh into thinking that no one had entered the cave for some time, while a pigeon is also said to have laid its eggs there to confirm the illusion. The event is recorded in these words:

A spider spun a cobweb, some parts of which covered others. The Quraysh made a frantic search for the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. They even came to the entrance of the cave, but someone among them said, Verily spiders haunt this place from before the birth of Muhammad; and they returned. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.265)

The legend is probably derived from Jewish folklore, however, for it is said that when David fled from Saul into the mouth of the cave in which he likewise hid from his pursuers, he too prayed to God to call a spider to weave a web for his sake in the mouth of the cave. It is certain, nonetheless, that Muhammad did conceal himself and Abu Bakr in the cave and that, although the Quraysh came right up to it, the two men were not discovered and they proceeded safely on their journey.

MUHAMMAD'S ARRIVAL IN MEDINA

A large crowd was eagerly expecting Muhammad's arrival in Medina. Before entering the town he spent some

time in Quba` just south of it with Abu Bakr and some of the leaders of the Aus and Khazraj. Here he built his first actual place of prayer and a mosque on the site to this day proudly claims to be the first mosque built in Islamic history.

On arrival at Medina the crowds gathered around him and many of his new companions begged him to stay with them. He declined and said he would leave it to the camel he was riding to choose his residence. It stopped in the area of the *Banu al-Najjar*. He learned from Mu`adh ibn `Afra that the land belonged to Sahl and Suhayl, the sons of `Amr, and he urged Muhammad to build his own mosque (*al-masjid*) there and to erect his living quarters alongside it. He duly obliged and his mosque, today greatly enlarged into possibly the biggest religious building in the world, still stands on the site. Muhammad himself is buried with its precincts.

The small band of loyal followers who had emigrated with Muhammad to Medina were regarded with great respect in Medina and they became known as *al-muhajirun*, "the emigrants", while the new group of disciples in the city were known as *al-ansar*, "the helpers". Together the two groups formed the nucleus of the new society of Muslims known as the *ummah*, the "community" of believers. There were a number of disaffected people in the city from both the Aus and Khazraj, however, and although they outwardly swore allegiance to Islam, their hearts were not with the Prophet. They were led by one `Abdullah ibn Ubayy and gave Muhammad much trouble in the coming years. The Qur'an calls them *al-munafiqun*, "the Hypocrites", and reproaches them very strongly:

Of the people there are some who say: "We believe in Allah and the Last Day", but they do not believe; in vain they would deceive Allah and the believers but they only deceive themselves without knowing it. In their hearts is a disease and Allah has increased their disease and a serious penalty they incur because of their falsehood.

Surah 2:8-10

Opposition from the Jews was destined to be more intense, however, as Muhammad sought to entrench Islam in his new domain.

3. MUHAMMAD'S TEN YEARS AT MEDINA

THE MUSLIMS AT MEDINA AND THE NAKHLAH RAID

The climate of Medina is tropical and humid in contrast with the dry climate of Mecca. The Muslims settled in well but some of them struggled to adapt to the atmosphere. Muhammad, however, soon grew to love the city and deeply appreciated its willingness to receive him as its leader at such a crucial time in his mission. He told its inhabitants that Allah would not fail to drive out anyone who tried to harm them, that it had its own way of driving out evil people and that *Dajjal*, the Islamic equivalent of the Antichrist, would not be able to enter it. The intensity of his affection for the city can be discerned in other statements he made about it, such as this one:

"I have declared sacred the territory between the two lava plains of Medina, so its trees should not be cut down, or its game killed"; and he also said "Medina is best for them if they knew. No one leaves it through dislike of it without Allah putting in it someone better than he in place of him; and no one will stay there in spite of its hardships and distress without my being an intercessor or witness on behalf of him on the Day of Resurrection". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.686)

In the early days the Muslims did not find things going their own way in Medina and many of them had to endure considerable poverty. Muhammad, however, adapted well to the limited supply of provisions and possessions and for the rest of his life he lived very simply, relying only on the basic necessities of life for his welfare. Shortly before leaving Mecca he had married his second wife, Sauda, and very soon after his arrival he took Ayishah, the daughter of Abu Bakr, as another wife even though she was still very much a child. He was to take many more wives in the next ten years although Ayishah was to be the only one who had never been married before. Muhammad had no apartment of his own but took turns in visiting each of the apartments he had built for his wives which were all adjacent to each other.

His companions from Mecca, the *muhajirun*, and the recently converted Muslims of Medina, the *ansar*, soon developed a spirit of brotherhood and the old tribal loyalties of Arabia were dispensed with as a new loyalty arose, the absolute loyalty of a Muslim to the community of Muslims. Up to fifty of the emigrants were taken in

by the citizens of Medina as their brothers and were accordingly entitled to inherit from them. The traditional balances in Arabian society were radically shifted as strangers from different tribes welcomed each other as brethren while disowning former family relatives as enemies of Allah.

Other traditions were soon to be violated. At the same time, however, instead of completely abandoning the customs of his forefathers, Muhammad concentrated his attention on Mecca. For a while the Muslims had faced Jerusalem, the site of the original Jewish temple known in Islam as *baitul-muqaddas*, "the holy house", but now a command came to turn around and change the *qiblah*, the direction of prayer, to the *masjidul-haram*, "the sacred mosque" at Mecca:

Now We shall turn you to a qiblah that will please you. Turn your face in the direction of the sacred mosque: wherever you are, turn your faces in that direction. *Surah 2:144*

Although the Ka'aba was still a pagan shrine at that time the call to face it in prayer was justified by a Qur'anic verse which teaches that it was originally built by Abraham and his son Ishmael and that it had only later become a focal-point of Arabian idolatry:

We covenanted with Abraham and Isma'il, that they should sanctify My House for those who circle around it, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves ... And remember how Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundation of the House: "Our Lord! Accept this from us, for you are the All-Hearing, All-Knowing". *Surah 2:125,127*

The Muslims soon eyed the regular caravan traffic passing from Mecca towards northern settlements and, as Medina lay right across the path of this trade route, it was not long before Muhammad sent out raiding parties to intercept them. The initial excursions proved fruitless but, during the second year of Muhammad's rule in Medina, he sent out `Abdullah ibn Jahsh with seven others to Nakhlah, a resting-place between Mecca and at-Ta'if. Two of them turned back but the remaining six came across a small group of four Quraysh returning to Mecca.

It was *Rajab*, one of the four holy months in Arabia, during which all hostilities were traditionally suspended, another custom about to be violated by the Muslims. When the Quraysh saw the men from Medina in the customary pilgrim dress and with their heads shaved, they were not alarmed and continued on their way. The six attacked them, however, and killed one of them while succeeding in capturing two others. Only one escaped. Nomadic Arabs had been raiding caravans for centuries so the event was not reproachable in itself, but in Arab eyes the attack on unarmed travellers in a sacred month was a cause of great offence.

Muhammad was not unaware of the gravity of the situation and at first refused the one-fifth of the booty which his followers offered him. In fact the whole of Medina was shocked by what had happened but a verse from the Qur'an, coming just at this time, justified the raid:

They will ask you about fighting in the sacred month. Say: "Fighting therein is serious, but it is more serious in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque, and to drive out its members". *Surah 2:217*

The incident set a precedent for the Muslims who had thusfar avoided all forms of physical conflict with the Quraysh. Muhammad, with the event justified as the lesser of two evils, then took his one-fifth of the booty for investment and distribution to the needy while awarding the rest to the raiding band, ransoming the prisoners at the same time. The apparent shift in conduct from a persecuted prophet bearing up patiently in the face of abuse to a warrior bent on plundering and violence is perhaps misleading. It appears that one of the very purposes of the emigration to Medina was to strengthen the Muslim position so that, whereas they found themselves unable to counter opposition in Mecca, they were now better equipped to confront them from Medina. This verse shows how much this sentiment had become the focus of the struggle:

Those who believed and those who were exiled and fought in the path of Allah have the hope in the mercy of Allah, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful. *Surah 2:218*

In the original text "those who were exiled and fought" are defined as *wallathiina haajaruu wa jaahadu*. The link between the words *hajaru* and *jahadu* appears to be quite deliberate. Those who were "exiled" are also those who "fought" in the path of Allah. From this time on all Muslims, whose initial community was centred on the

believers in Medina, were bound to fight in the way of Allah against all who came against them.

It was not long, however, before a major confrontation was to take place between the Muslims and the Quraysh. Once a year a major caravan set out for Syria from Mecca. Muhammad was informed of its pending return and he planned to capture it. At its head was one of the leading descendants of Umayya, Abu Sufyan, and when he was warned of Muhammad's plans, he immediately sent a messenger on ahead of him to call for help from Mecca while hastening on at the same time himself with the whole party. He managed to outstrip the army of about three hundred Muslims which had joined Muhammad in tracking the caravan down but the Meccan army, which had come out to protect it, came face-to-face with the Muslims at a place called Badr near the Red Sea.

THE GREAT BATTLES OF BADR AND UHUD

The Muslims were outnumbered at least two-to-one but were told by Muhammad that Allah had promised them either the caravan or the army as a prize of war. Buoyed on by the news the Muslims joined battle and, after some of them had won individual contests with the Quraysh, the rest stormed into the fight and, despite being outnumbered, prevailed and put the Quraysh to flight. In the event only fourteen Muslims lost their lives but about seventy of the Quraysh perished, among them some of their leaders including Muhammad's great enemy Abu Jahl. The battle may seem to be of small proportions when compared with other major contests in history, but its significance and value for the growing Muslim community was immense. The vulnerability of the Muslims was finally discounted and their esteem in Medina grew considerably.

One explanation for the Muslims' victory was their willingness to engage members of their own tribe and families in contrast with the hesitancy of the Quraysh, following Arab customs, to fight and kill their own relatives. The policy of Muhammad, namely to engage only the most hostile of their leaders and kill them rather than the general throng, also upset the leadership of the Meccans in the battle, though Muhammad tried to avoid direct conflict with members of the Banu Hashim in appreciation of their protection and support during the years of the boycott in Mecca.

The Muslims had to decide what to do with their captives. A verse from the Qur'an came, stating that it was not right for a prophet to imprison people or tyrannize the land (*Surah 8:67*), and so most of them were either ransomed or set free unconditionally. Two of them were executed, however, both for challenging Muhammad's prophethood. `Uqbah ibn Abu Mu'ayt had composed satirical verses about him while An-Nadr ibn al-Harith had claimed that his rhymes about Persian customs and history were as good as those in the Qur'an. On other occasions Muhammad had people executed or sought their demise for composing verses said to be as divine as those he was transmitting from the Qur'an and it appears that he was particularly sensitive to any challenge to his proclamation that his Qur'an was inimitable.

The defeat at Badr was greeted with total dismay in Mecca, however, and the people swore not to rest until they had avenged those who had been killed in the battle. A year later a much larger army under Abu Sufyan set out from the city to confront the Muslims. They encamped on the plain below the hill of Uhud to the north of Medina while Muhammad advised his warriors to remain within the city where it would be much easier for them to defend themselves. They were still motivated by the belief that Allah had helped them to win the battle at Badr and, when some of the younger men sought to go out and again take the fight to the Quraysh, Muhammad was obliged to go out with them. `Abdullah ibn Ubayy persuaded a number of them to withdraw, however, and when they finally came to Uhud they found themselves greatly outnumbered. In the circumstances Muhammad advised them not to take the battle to the enemy but to let the Quraysh come at them at first.

Once again they seized the initiative and despite the odds began to drive the Quraysh back. The Muslim archers defending their rearguard on the hill, however, broke ranks and Khalid ibn Walid, seeing the opportunity to attack them from behind, led his cavalry around the back of the hill and came on them by surprise. The Muslims were thrown into complete disarray. Hamzah, Muhammad's uncle, was killed and Hind, Abu Sufyan's wife, disembowelled him and ate his liver in fulfilment of a vow taken just after Badr. Muhammad himself was seriously injured in the struggle and some of the Quraysh thought they had killed him. This might explain their reluctance to press home their advantage when the Muslims were in retreat. Instead, satisfied that they had avenged their losses at Badr (this time the Muslims lost seventy-four men while only twenty Quraysh were killed), they challenged the Muslims to meet them again at Badr the following year. The contest never took place although a small Muslim contingent went out as a gesture of their preparedness to meet them again. The defeat at

Uhud, nevertheless, had ominous implications for the Muslims. If Allah had secured the victory at Badr, why had they lost this contest?

A revelation from the Qur'an soon helped Muhammad to silence murmurings among his companions. They were blamed for failing to take the advice of their prophet and for seeking to share in the booty rather than seeking the rewards of the hereafter:

Behold! You were climbing up the high ground without even looking aside at any one while the Apostle behind you was calling you back. So Allah opposed you with great distress to teach you not to grieve for what you had missed and for all that had befallen you. And Allah is well aware of all that you do. *Surah 3:153*

After the Battle of Badr Muhammad had released Abu `Azzah, one of the many prisoners he had held, because he had pleaded with him for the five children he had left at home. He was set free on condition that he did not again engage the Muslims in battle. When he was taken captive after the Battle of Uhud he again pleaded for mercy but he was beheaded after Muhammad had said to him:

Verily a believer is not stung twice from the same hole. You will not return to Makkah to declare, rubbing your cheeks, that you had befooled Muhammad twice. (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.51)

The raiding of caravans carried on and Muhammad's influence continued to grow so that the Quraysh soon regretted that they had not dealt with him once and for all at Uhud. A year later they gathered a great army of their own men with contingents from tribes allied to them. Eventually ten thousand warriors, known as the Confederates, marched on Medina to finally annihilate the Muslim menace.

THE BATTLE OF THE DITCH AND TREATY OF HUDAYBIYAH

The Muslims were greatly disturbed when they learned of the size of the army that was marching on Medina. They had not forgotten their losses at the Battle of Uhud and the onslaught of a new force three times the size of the last one filled them with fear and foreboding. Nonetheless they had learnt one very important lesson at Uhud – to defend Medina from within its own walls and not to go out into the open.

A Persian convert to Islam, Salman al-Farisi, suggested the building of a trench around the exposed parts of the city. Most of Medina was protected by natural obstacles such as hills and mountains but there were a few exposed areas. This was a novel idea, one completely unknown to the Arabs but a tactic he had learnt in Persia. The Muslims wisely took his advice and managed to dig the trench in time. The Quraysh and their allies were confounded by this new method of defensive warfare and accused the Muslims of cowardice and of an innovation not previously known in the chivalrous warfare to which they were accustomed. If this seems strange it is worth noting that, as Islam developed, it too became resistant to any form of *bid'ah*, "innovation", which might change its basic character and practices.

The Quraysh camped in the plain called Rumah while their allies set their camps nearby. It soon became obvious to Abu Sufyan that the city could not be taken by storm and so they settled in for a siege. The elements, however, greatly distressed the Confederate force. It was very cold and they had no protection in their small tents from the howling winds and threatening storms. Nonetheless, when the *Banu Quraydhah*, a Jewish quarter on the edge of the city, forged an alliance against the Muslims they became extremely concerned that their enemies might gain access there to the city and the Qur'an shows how fearful they were:

Behold they came on you from above and below you and your eyes became dim and your hearts gaped up to your throats and you imagined various things about Allah. In that situation the believers were tested, they were shaken by a tremendous shaking. *Surah 33:10-11*

The threat was very real but, by a subtle subterfuge, the Muslims succeeded in sowing doubts among the Confederate forces about their loyalty to one another. Then one night a raging wind and rainstorm ripped up many of their tents and their willingness to continue the siege abated. When some of the allied forces began to withdraw the Quraysh too decided to give up the fight and they soon left the area. The Muslims were greatly relieved and gave praise to Allah for their deliverance. In fact the Meccan opposition to Muhammad was by now exhausted. The Quraysh had rallied their greatest possible force to destroy him once and for all and yet had returned home without a fight. It was time for the tide to turn and from here on the Muslims took the offensive.

Muhammad settled on an ingenious way of getting into Mecca. A year after the siege he led one-and-a-half thousand Muslims in pilgrimage dress to perform the annual pilgrimage. They carried no weaponry except the traditional handknife. When the Quraysh heard of their advance they were greatly disturbed as it was one of the holy months and their customs forbade them to attack the Muslims. So they met the Muslims just outside Mecca at a valley called Hudaibiyah. A small deputation went out to discover Muhammad's real intentions while the rest prepared to defend the city. Led by one Suhail ibn `Amr they took `Uthman and a small Muslim contingent into Mecca and, when they failed to return in good time, the Muslims prepared to defend themselves. Under a tree they took a solemn oath to protect Muhammad with their lives. Nonetheless `Uthman duly returned and told Muhammad they were not allowed to enter Mecca on this occasion but could return the following year when the citizens would vacate the city for three days. Muhammad accepted the terms much to the dismay of his companions. `Umar objected to the whole affair by arguing that the Muslims had been commanded to subdue and overcome pagans and should not humiliate themselves by negotiating with them on equal terms.

`Umar b. al-Khattab came, approached the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) and said: Messenger of Allah, are we not fighting for the truth and they for falsehood? He replied: By all means. He asked: Are not those killed from our side in Paradise and those killed from their side in the Fire? He replied: Yes. He said: Then why should we put a blot on our religion and return while Allah has not decided the issue between them and ourselves? He said: Son of al-Khattab, I am the Messenger of Allah. Allah will never ruin me. `Umar went away but he could not contain himself with rage. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.980)

In fact the treaty was hardly equitable as Muhammad seems to have conceded to terms humiliating to the Muslims. One of its conditions was that, if anyone from the Quraysh should become a Muslim, he was to be returned to Mecca but, if a Muslim wished to renege from Islam, the Quraysh were not obliged to reciprocate. The reaction of the Muslims is clear from this brief account:

When Suhail bin `Amr agreed to the treaty, one of the things he stipulated was that the Prophet should return to them anyone coming from their side, even if he was a Muslim, and would not interfere between them and that person. The Muslims did not like this condition and were disgusted with it. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.3, p.547)

Their anger grew even more when Muhammad acquiesced in the demands of Suhail that the treaty should not begin with the traditional Muslim invocation *Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim* ("In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful") but rather with the introduction which the Quraysh preferred, namely *Bi'ismika Allahumma* ("In thy Name, O Allah"). Muhammad made yet another concession when, after first signing the treaty as *Muhammadur-Rasulullah* ("Muhammad the Messenger of Allah") he agreed to strike it out and replace it with *Muhammad ibn `Abdullah* ("Muhammad son of `Abdullah").

Then the Apostle summoned `Ali and told him to write 'In the Name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful'. Suhayl said "I do not recognise this; but write 'In thy Name, O Allah'". The Apostle told him to write the latter and he did so. Then he said: "Write, 'This is what Muhammad the Apostle of Allah has agreed with Suhayl ibn `Amr'". Suhayl said, "If I witnessed that you were Allah's apostle I would not have fought you. Write your own name and the name of your father". The Apostle said: "Write, 'This is what Muhammad b. `Abdullah has agreed with Suhayl b. `Amr'". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.504)

`Ali was also highly annoyed at the developments and if Muhammad had not enjoyed the unstinting devotion of his followers, he could have found himself facing a credibility crisis. When the Quraysh told Muhammad to strike out the reference to himself as the Messenger of Allah, he ordered `Ali to do so but he declared that, by Allah, he would not. Muhammad had to do so himself but, as so often happened at times where Muhammad needed justification of his acts, a revelation of the Qur'an came to silence the murmurers:

Truly we have granted you a clear victory so that God may forgive your past and future sins, grant you his blessings, and guide you into the straight path. *Surah 48:1-2*

There was in fact much to be gained from the outcome. For the first time the Quraysh had negotiated with Muhammad on equal terms and for the foreseeable future he could continue to expand without fear of attack from them. He had also succeeded in getting the Quraysh to allow him to visit Mecca for three days the next year, a concession which was to lead to the eventual demise of Meccan opposition to him. He was now free to canvass new allies and gained the allegiance of the tribe of Khuza'ah nearby. During the year other conquests

strengthened his position and a year later he duly made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The people were weary of the conflict that had gone on now for so many years and they observed the Muslims performing the traditional rites of pilgrimage with mixed feelings. While they offered no worship to the idols in and around the Ka'aba they nevertheless fully respected the shrine and the other holy places around it. The total devotion of the Muslims to Muhammad could not but impress them and, consciously or otherwise, their opposition to the Prophet dissipated as they saw his love for the city of his birth and his respect for the famous shrine inside it.

By this time Khalid ibn Walid, the great Meccan warrior, had converted to Islam and for a while Muhammad concentrated on fighting enemies to the north of Medina. He sent an expedition to Mu'tah, a town on the border of Syria, where his army came into contact with Byzantine forces for the first time. The Muslims were repulsed and Muhammad's adopted son Zaid ibn Haritha was killed in the battle along with a number of other prominent Muslims. Led by Khalid the force had to return to Medina.

The setback did not really affect his position at home, however, and he continued to consolidate his authority. By this time numerous tribes and bedouin nomads in the area were coming over to Islam and it was obvious that it would not be long before the whole of Arabia would convert to his cause. Mecca, however, remained the major obstacle and a minor skirmish at about this time finally gave Muhammad the pretext he needed to launch a fullscale onslaught on the city.

4. THE CAPTURE OF MECCA AND OTHER TRIUMPHS

MUHAMMAD'S SUCCESSFUL CONQUEST OF MECCA

The Treaty of Hudaibiyah did not make the Quraysh and the Muslims allies. Muhammad had for a long time determined to conquer Mecca for Islam and it was not long before a pretext arose to give him the opportunity he sought to march against it. Before his warriors had even returned from Mu'tah a confrontation took place between the *Banu Khuza'ah*, recently allied to Muhammad, and the *Banu Bakr*, a tribe allied to the Quraysh. While some of the Khuza'ah were camping near a well of theirs known as Watir, they were attacked by the Bakr with arms and equipment said to have been supplied by `Ikrimah ibn Abu Jahl, the son of Muhammad's great enemy, and other members of the Quraysh. When word of this reached him, Muhammad immediately summoned all the Muslims he could gather together from Medina and the region round about and prepared to march on Mecca.

Abu Sufyan, aware of the danger, went to Medina himself to attempt to reinstate the treaty but he was sent away empty-handed. A force ten thousand strong marched southwards out of Medina. By now al-`Abbas, Muhammad's uncle, had decided that the balances were totally tilted in the favour of his nephew and he went out to greet him and swore his allegiance to Islam. As the army approached Mecca Abu Sufyan again went out and this time, with al-`Abbas' assistance, gained a personal audience with Muhammad who asked him whether the time had not surely come for him to acknowledge his prophethood and the absolute unity of Allah who could not be associated with anyone. The Meccan leader replied that he had no problem with Allah as the only true God but that he still had some doubts about Muhammad's prophethood. Al-`Abbas told him this was no time for uncertainty and, seeing the futility of his position, he then likewise swore his allegiance to Islam on the condition that the city was spared if it gave in peacefully. The Muslim hordes, eager for a fight and the spoils of victory, were keenly offended when Muhammad indicated his acceptance as they had long wanted to avenge themselves on the Quraysh but the Prophet's prime aim was to win the hearts of the people and so he boldly declared:

"Who enters the house of Abu Sufyan will be safe, who lays down arms will be safe, who locks his door will be safe". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.977)

Apart from some resistance in the southern quarter of the city led by `Ikrimah and Suhail, the people capitulated peacefully and Muhammad duly entered the city and went first to the Ka'aba. He ordered all its idols destroyed. The Muslims gathered with great joy around the shrine and Bilal, Muhammad's convert from Abyssinia, mounted it and called the warriors to prayer. A general amnesty was declared and the people turned gratefully to Muhammad's side and embraced Islam. It was the moment of supreme victory in the Prophet's life and he savoured the opportunity to stand triumphant in the city which for so long had bitterly opposed him.

Not everyone benefitted from the amnesty, though. A number of the Quraysh were ordered to be put to death even if found clutching the cloth covering the Ka'aba. Only four were actually executed. Two had formerly been Muslims who were guilty of murder in Medina and had fled to Mecca as apostates from Islam, one was a slave woman who had abused Muhammad in her songs while the last was al-Huwayrith who had assaulted his daughter Zaynab as she left Mecca for Medina.

Those who escaped death had either fled the area or were pardoned by the Prophet. `Ikrimah was spared after his wife converted to Islam and besought Muhammad to forgive her husband. Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan who had chewed the liver of Hamzah at Uhud, was likewise spared as was 'Abdullah ibn Abu al-Sarh who had once converted to Islam and had actually transcribed portions of the Qur'an but had apostatised from Islam and returned to Mecca where he claimed he had falsified verses of the Qur'an without Muhammad even noticing.

Shortly after the conquest of Mecca the Khuza'ah tribe found one of the Hudhayl tribesmen who was still a pagan and they immediately killed him. Muhammad, however, was extremely angry at this and personally ensured that his bloodwit was paid to the tribe as recompense for his death. At the same time he charged the Muslims to highly respect Mecca as a city which Allah had declared holy on the day he made the heavens and the earth. No true believers were entitled to shed any blood in it, cut down its trees or otherwise desecrate it. He concluded by declaring his love for all the people of Mecca and told them he would never have left them if only they had accepted his message. With these words he won over its inhabitants and consecrated it as the holy city of Islam and the Muslim world.

Muhammad remained there fifteen days during which he set about organising ways of instructing the people in Islam. At the same time he sent out delegations to call those around the city to peacefully submit to Islam and to destroy their idols. Khalid ibn al-Walid first went to Nakhlah where the *Banu Shayban* offered no resistance to the destruction of their idol al-'Uzza. When he came to Jadhimah, however, the people there took up arms against him. While they debated among themselves as to whether they should submit or not Khalid took some of them and killed them as an example to the others. Once again Muhammad was dismayed at the news and he sent `Ali, his son-in-law, to compensate the tribe for their losses as he had done with the Hudhayl tribesmen. He was very keen to win over the loyalty of his own kinsmen by example rather than by force so that it would be genuine and lasting.

THE SUBMISSION OF ALL ARABIA TO ISLAM

There was little time for Muhammad and the Muslims of Medina to enjoy the fruits of their success. Almost immediately they and the new converts in Mecca were forced to join together to defend themselves against a major onslaught by the Hawazin tribe located southeast of Mecca. These inhabitants from the nearby hills and valleys were alarmed at the capitulation of Mecca and, under the leadership of Malik ibn `Awf al-Nadri, they gathered together the Thaqif tribe with other local tribesmen and took everything they possessed with them in a do-or-die onslaught on the Muslims. Muhammad immediately sent his warriors out to meet them and, leading the army himself, they met their enemies at the valley of Hunayn. The same ten thousand Muslims from Medina who had conquered Mecca joined forces with two thousand Quraysh from Mecca under the leadership of Abu Sufyan. Outnumbering their opponents, they ventured confidently into battle and once again expected Allah to give them a convincing victory.

Malik, however, inspired his warriors to launch a surprise attack in the darkness just before dawn and the Muslims were thrown into total confusion. As some of them panicked and fled past Muhammad without even recognising him, others among the Quraysh whose commitment to Islam was still suspect wondered if this was not to be his day of defeat. This was to be yet another of those vital moments when Muhammad's whole authority over his followers was to be put to the test in adverse circumstances. He personally took charge, nonetheless, and despite the chaos managed to rally the Muslims with the help of al-'Abbas who called them to remember their covenants with him. Some three hundred gathered around the Prophet and repelled the Hawazin. They were joined by others until finally the tide turned and the Hawazin began to flee. In disarray they left behind all their possessions including thousands of camels, goats and much silver. The Qur'an celebrates the victory in these words:

Surely Allah has helped you on many occasions and on the Day of Hunayn. Indeed your great numbers elated you but they did not help you. The extent of the terrain constrained you and you turned back in retreat. But Allah

sent down his peace on the Apostle and the believers, He sent forces which you did not see to repel the pagans and so punished the unfaithful. *Surah 9:25-26*

The ferocity of the attack troubled Muhammad and he determined that from that day onward no pagan should be allowed to enter Mecca lest the city be tempted to renege from Islam. Immediately after this the Qur'an goes on to say:

O you who believe! Truly the pagans are unclean so do not let them approach the Sacred Mosque after this year. *Surah 9:28*

To this day only Muslims are allowed to enter the city. Nonetheless the Muslims themselves were annoyed after the battle when they saw their Prophet distributing the booty very generously among the recent Meccan converts to Islam. They complained that they had fought faithfully alongside him for many years at great danger to themselves while the Quraysh had thusfar bitterly opposed him. Was there not an injustice in his preference of them at this time?

When Allah gave to his Apostle the war booty on the day of Hunain, he distributed that booty amongst those whose hearts had just been reconciled to Islam but he did not give anything to the Ansar. So they seemed to have felt angry and sad as they did not get the same as other people had got. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.432)

Muhammad replied that, while he had given the Meccans material possessions, he himself belonged to Medina and that he would return with them to the city and never leave it. He had given the booty away simply to confirm their trust in him. The Muslims accepted his explanation.

One stronghold still held out against the expansion of Islam. At-Ta'if, the settlement which had rejected Muhammad many years earlier, continued to oppose him and, as his warriors approached its fortifications, the defenders showered them with arrows. Finding no way to storm the walls, the Muslims set siege to the fortress and battered it with a catapult. The defenders responded by hurling burning shafts of hot iron. Eventually Muhammad set about burning their orchards and vineyards. A few of the men came out and responded to his call to submit peacefully but the rest of them resisted. Learning that they were well stocked with food and ammunition, Muhammad was forced to withdraw.

A convert to Islam, `Urwah ibn Mas`ud, was subsequently murdered by the Thaqif tribe at at-Ta'if when he tried to convert them to Islam. This time Muhammad planned an all-out onslaught on the settlement and they finally realised their time was up. They sent a delegation to him requesting a three-year period of grace but he refused and insisted on their conversion, the destruction of their idol al-Lat, and the observance of the Islamic prayers. They agreed to surrender and Muhammad wisely sent Abu Sufyan and al-Mughirah, who had just converted to Islam and were friendly with at-Ta'if's inhabitants, to destroy the idol. Many of the women wailed as it fell, the only recorded occasion where the destruction of an idol excited sympathy from its devotees.

Deputations came from all over Arabia to Medina to swear their allegiance to Muhammad and to embrace Islam. By his sixty-third year virtually the whole of the Peninsula had come under his rule. In his triumph he made one last visit to Mecca to perform the farewell pilgrimage in the company of thousands of Muslims whom he addressed:

O men, listen to my words. I do not know whether I shall ever meet you in this place again after this year. Your blood and your property are sacrosanct until you meet your Lord. All blood shed in the pagan period is to be left unavenged. Satan despairs of ever being worshipped in your land. Lay injunctions on women kindly, for they are prisoners with you having no control of their persons. You have taken them only as a trust from God. I have left with you something which if you will hold fast to it you will never fall into error, a plain indication, the *kitab* (book) of Allah and the *sunnah* (practice) of His prophet. Know that every Muslim is a Muslim's brother and that the Muslims are brethren. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.651)

At the same time the following verse from the Qur'an was revealed to declare to the Muslims that their Prophet's work was complete:

This day have the pagans given up all hope of overcoming your religion. Do not fear them but fear Me. This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favours toward you, and chosen as your religion *al-Islam*. *Surah 5:4*

THE LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH OF MUHAMMAD

With no threat from any quarter in Arabia Muhammad planned to avenge the Battle of Mu`tah. As he organised an army to set forth he suddenly became seriously ill. He had up to this time been in good health but now he was struck with a high fever and his nights were sleepless. He ventured out one night to the local cemetery in Medina and addressed all those buried there as blessed to be released from the cares of this world. He was accompanied by Abu Muwayhibah and on their return he told him that he had been offered the keys of this present life or a place in Paradise. When his companion asked if he could not have both he replied no, and answered that he had chosen Paradise and to meet with his Lord.

On his return his fever increased and his wives did all they could to relieve his pain and discomfort, pouring water over him continuously. He could no longer lead the prayers in the mosque and the many Muslims gathered in Medina became extremely anxious for his welfare. Slowly he relapsed into spells of unconsciousness. One day, appearing to recover, he went in to the mosque and, although very weak, led the prayers. The Muslims were overjoyed but, soon after his return to Ayishah's apartment, he relapsed again and, with his head on her lap and uttering faint cries of triumph and hope, he suddenly breathed his last.

When news of his death reached the congregation pandemonium broke out. On seeing it `Umar boldly proclaimed that Allah's prophet could never die and that he would summarily dismember anyone who falsely spread such a rumour. Abu Bakr came in, however, and after calming the crowd proclaimed: "Let anyone who worshipped Muhammad know that Muhammad is dead, but for him who worships Allah, let him know that Allah lives". He then quoted these words from the Qur'an:

Muhammad is no more than an apostle, many such apostles passed away before him. If he died or were slain, would you turn back on your heels? If any should turn back on his heels he will do no harm to Allah, but Allah will swiftly reward those who serve him with gratitude. *Surah 3:144*

The life of the great Prophet of Islam was over. He was buried in the chamber of his favourite wife Ayishah and his tomb forms part of the Great Mosque of Medina to this day. Not long after his death, however, Islam spread rapidly and within a century had conquered an empire as extensive as the Roman Empire had been in its prime.

Chapter Three

His Personality: The Character of Muhammad

1. A REVIEW OF MUHAMMAD'S PERSONALITY

A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF HIS CHARACTER

No one can study the life of Muhammad without being impressed with his rise from a mere citizen of Mecca to the undisputed role of the leader of the Arabs throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Yet even here a general historical perspective is insufficient. It is not just a dominant figure that is under consideration but one who claimed to be the last and greatest of all God's prophets for all humanity from the beginning to the end of time. He has to be assessed from a religious as well as an historical viewpoint and it is perhaps appropriate to make such an evaluation at this very point before examining his prophetic convictions in more detail.

The Muslim world draws an absolute conclusion here without further ado. Muhammad was the greatest of all the prophets, indeed Allah's universal messenger to all mankind, and an example of human conduct and behaviour without reproach. He was sinless, though not without human failings, but irreproachable in his role as His choice representative on earth. The Christian view, however, has been very different and has generally perceived him to be, on the one hand, a great leader and reformer who led the Arabs out of pagan darkness, to the other extreme, namely that he was a demon-possessed impostor whose deliberate purpose was to lead the world astray and to darken the minds of millions of men from seeking the light of the Gospel of Christ.

There are a number of ways in which Muhammad's prophetic course can be fairly assessed. He can be appraised purely on the merits of his own character, he can be evaluated in the light of his reputation among his immediate contemporaries and, as a claimant to divine prophethood, he can be compared with Jesus Christ, the founder of the world's other universal monotheistic faith. In evaluating his character firstly, it does not appear proper to prejudge him or to approach him negatively as a matter of course. An objective perspective will reveal his true temperament and it is important to let his words and deeds speak for themselves.

Muhammad did not deny that he had faults of his own. Some of these are mentioned in the Qur'an, such as the reproach he receives for turning away from a man purely because he was blind (*Surah 80:2*). He nowhere appears as the kind of pretender one would otherwise expect who would find no fault in himself but be concerned only to project himself as a perfect example. Indeed a charge of deliberate imposture or falsehood appears to be untenable when his singleminded devotion to his purpose, at times in the face of great odds, is genuinely appreciated.

He believed quite sincerely that he was called by Allah to turn his people away from pagan distractions to the worship of the one Supreme Being. In this pursuit he hardly wavered despite, as has been seen, numerous occasions where he found himself almost alone in his quest and facing severe persecution. The journey to at-Ta'if was perhaps the lowest point in his fortunes yet even here there was no disillusionment or doubting regarding his purpose. At one point he declared that, if the sun was arrayed on his right hand and the moon on his left, he would not renounce his call as long as his Lord should command him. Even when he might have been tempted to make some claim to the proof of his mission, such as the power to perform miracles, he did not and sustained his charge that the Qur'an itself was a miracle and a sufficient proof of his vocation.

Most importantly, and perhaps even extraordinarily, he not only kept his course but also retained a clearly defined understanding as to its limits. He was no more than a human being, no different to the messengers of Allah who preceded him and just as prone to passing away at any time as they did (*Surah 3:144*). His prime concern was that his hearers should follow the way of his Lord (*Surah 25:57*). Although mocked and rejected as possessed with madness he was to see himself solely as a warner to call his people back to the truth (*Surah 7:184*).

The simplicity of his life also testifies to his personal sincerity. In all his years of opposition at Mecca he lived frugally and continued to do so even when he was enjoying increasing success in Medina with the whole of Arabia gradually coming under his control. To his death he was still willing to sweep his own bed chamber, do his own regular chores, and fit in with the general lifestyle of his companions. At no time did he ever project anything like the image or pomp of a king and when he died he had to be buried in one of the simple chambers of his wives, having no home or quarter of his own. If it be said that he aimed at universal dominion it has to be conceded that it was the dominion of Allah as the eternal sovereign over the hearts of Muslim believers. He never saw himself as anything but a simple mediator to achieve this goal.

Even in the religious realm there is likewise a keen sense of the spirit of a man aware of his place in a greater scheme of things. Islam did not come as a new thing to supplant all that had preceded it but only as a confirmation of previous revelations. The Muslims were called to follow the faith of Abraham the upright and to respect the contributions of the great prophets of former times (*Surah 2:135-136*). Muhammad came only to redefine the path of Allah, not to set out a new course with his own personal imprint on it.

Those Christians who seek to degrade the Prophet of Islam and demonise him in every possible way have never seriously tried to evaluate him in the light of his own generation. From any objective point of view he stands out as one of the giants of human history, but in the context of his own era, arising as he did out of the obscure wastelands of Arabia at a time when virtually no attention was given to this part of the world, he has to be acknowledged as a truly remarkable man. No Christian will be able to really understand what motivates the dedicated faith of hundreds of millions of Muslims in the world to this day unless he first discerns the impact that the personality of Muhammad himself had on that early generation of believers. It will be appropriate at this point to see precisely how his contemporary followers saw him in the light of their daily interactions with him in all spheres of life.

THE TESTIMONY OF MUHAMMAD'S COMPANIONS

Perhaps the best test of a man's sincerity is the witness of his closest associates. In Muhammad's case it seems that those who knew him most intimately and would have been most aware of his weaknesses are also those who believed in him most implicitly. There are a few records of apostasy, in particular from some of his scribes who queried the divine inspiration alleged to be behind the delivery of the Qur'an, but they tend to be exceptions and not the rule. In general it must be acknowledged that he was genuinely persuaded that he was called to be the Messenger of Allah to the worlds and his overall character and lifestyle were sufficient to persuade his household and close followers of his credibility.

The integrity of many of his most prominent companions is also not seriously open to doubt. Abu Bakr and `Umar, his two immediate successors, were men of great character and they would have detected any inconsistency in his profession had his public image not accorded with the man they knew in private. Abu Bakr in particular, who had earned the nickname *as-Siddiq* ("the Trustworthy"), maintained an intense devotion to Muhammad and kept faith with him during his years of struggle when it must have seemed at times that he would never gain general acceptance among his people. Abu Bakr's presence with him in the cave near Mecca at the time of the Hijrah testifies further to the unwavering loyalty that Muhammad was able to gain from his followers for it would have been the ideal time, had he distrusted the Prophet's sincerity, to quietly distance himself from his cause rather than so obviously risk his life.

Even when Muhammad made an extraordinary claim to have visited Jerusalem and even the inner sanctuaries of heaven itself one night in a nocturnal vision at the very time when Meccan opposition was at its most hostile, Abu Bakr did not question his integrity. He is recorded as standing by him even when some of the Quraysh tried to stone him.

The little knowledge we have of his personality before the time when he came to public prominence nonetheless also witnesses to his general integrity of character. He was known to be trustworthy in all his actions and dependable in business dealings. Khadija, a wise woman with much experience in such affairs, took to him very quickly and he was not given the title *al-Amin* ("The Faithful") for nothing. Judged relatively by the standards of his day and by his overall disposition he appears worthy of much respect and a man of a generally unimpeachable character. Yet the Christian cannot rest his assessment here, however, for the man under consideration did not claim just to be a likeable person with an agreeable manner. Anyone who projects himself as the finest and greatest of all God's messengers in history immediately exposes himself to the most exacting scrutiny to prove his claims. The decision cannot rest on a favourable subjective test of his own convictions, nor can he be judged purely by the relative standards of his day as is often suggested in biographies of the Prophet.

A RELATIVE OR AN ABSOLUTE STANDARD OF JUDGMENT?

In seventh-century Arabia polygamy was regarded as perfectly acceptable and caravan-raiding was often looked on as a natural pursuit. The wise man did not question the morality of such activity, he simply sought to defend himself and protect his property as best he could and with the assistance of his tribe or clan. Muhammad passed no judgments on either of these two facets of Arabian life and it has often been suggested that it is improper to critically evaluate him against the background of standards in the traditional Christian world.

Muhammad cannot be allowed to escape such analysis. He openly projected himself as a universal messenger to the whole of mankind (*kaaffatan-linnaasi*) to give them glad tidings and warnings (*Surah 34:28*), the Qur'an states that Allah himself and all the angels of heaven send down blessings upon him (*Surah 33:56*), he is described as a mercy to all the worlds (*rahmatan-lil'aalamiin*) sent by Allah himself, and the seal of all the prophets (*khaataman-nabiyyiin*) and the Apostle of Allah (*Surah 33:40*). These are all claims to universal leadership and example and, in making them, he must be judged by absolute standards.

In consequence of such claims it is hardly surprising to find Muslims themselves using absolute language to describe him. He is said to have led a life, dedicated from first to last, to the service of humanity; a life which is the noblest and most faithful ever lived. It is boldly asked whether there was ever another life to compare with his which has withstood the fire of the world and come out unscathed, despite numerous trials and temptations. When such claims are made it cannot fairly be said that he should be assessed purely by the standards of his own time or solely in the light of his own personal sincerity.

Other great men like Gautama Buddha and Confucius can possibly be evaluated purely in the light of their own

personalities and teachings but the Prophet of Islam, who claimed to be the last and greatest in a line of messengers divinely commissioned which included the person of Jesus Christ, cannot be exempted from a more searching analysis. Indeed it has always been a fundamental tenet of Christian faith that Jesus Christ was not only the greatest man who ever lived but a perfect man with a human character *par excellence*. He was sinless, faultless in his conduct, with all the virtues of his personality consistent with divine standards of absolute perfection. Muhammad invites comparison with him when he claims that he is his equal as appears from the following record:

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind, and all the prophets are of different mothers but belong to one religion and no Prophet was raised between me and Jesus. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1260)

When Muhammad not only claims match Jesus Christ but even to displace him at some points, he again invites history to judge him by the most precise standards. A typical example of such a claim, where he is again found to be projecting himself as the foremost of all men in human history, is found in this record of his teachings:

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: I shall be pre-eminent among the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I will be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah). (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1230)

An analysis of his treatment of his enemies, in particular his relationships with the Jews and Christians of Arabia, as well as his many marriages will show to what extent his claims prove to be valid or not.

2. HIS TREATMENT OF HIS ENEMIES

THE ASSASSINATION OF KA`B IBN ASHRAF

The Battle of Badr was Muhammad's first direct military confrontation with the people of Mecca. It also initiated a new perspective on both sides which resulted in each treating the other no longer as a troublesome adversary but as a sworn enemy. It was not long before Muhammad himself had to deal with this situation as some of his opponents within Medina, whom he had hitherto treated as irritating antagonists, became serious foes whose influence had to be checked.

The first of these was one Ka`b ibn Ashraf, a Jew who was resident in Medina and who had long been a nuisance to the Prophet in composing satirical verses against him. After the Battle of Badr he became a real threat as he visited Mecca and stirred up the Quraysh to mount a reprisal raid against the Muslims in the hope of neutralising their gains and nullifying the increased prestige Muhammad had obtained in his new city. He composed poems lamenting the leaders of the Quraysh who had been slain at Badr and, when Muhammad learnt of his plans, he made it clear to his followers that he wanted him out of the way. What followed is narrated in many of the early traditions.

Narrated Jabir: The Prophet said, "Who is ready to kill Ka`b ibn Ashraf?". Muhammad bin Maslama replied, "Do you like me to kill him?" The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Muhammad bin Maslama said, "Then allow me to say what I like". The Prophet replied, "I do". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.168)

It is clear from this narrative that Muhammad not only sanctioned the murder of his opponent but also permitted his followers to use whatever deception they considered necessary to achieve their purpose. In another tradition Muhammad bin Maslama's statement "allow me to say what I like" is interpreted to mean that he should be allowed to say a "false" thing to deceive Ka`b (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.248). This was the first occasion that Muhammad, now in a state of actual warfare with those who withstood him, had to prescribe a policy in dealing with them and his licence to his companions to not only assassinate but also to deceive them became a precedent in his future attitudes towards his foes. An early biographer is quite emphatic in his record of this commission:

The apostle said, "All that is incumbent upon you is that you should try". He answered, "O apostle of God, we shall have to tell lies". He answered "Say what you like, for you are free in the matter". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.367)

It cannot be denied that this was a direct order to one of his followers to murder one of his opponents and to use

any manner of lies to achieve his purpose. It is hardly surprising to find that his companion of the same name duly took advantage of his commission to despatch the offending Jew and kill him under the cover of darkness:

Muhammad b. Maslama came to Ka`b and talked to him, referred to the old friendship between them and said: This man (i.e. the Holy Prophet) has made up his mind to collect charity (from us) and this has put us to a great hardship. When he heard this, Ka`b said, By God, you will be put to more trouble by him. Muhammad b. Maslama said: No doubt, now we have become his followers and we do not like to forsake him until we see what turn his affairs will take. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.991)

Muhammad's companion had only persuaded Ka'b to leave the security of his home by deceiving him into thinking that his group was disillusioned by Muhammad's intention to financially burden the Muslims. As Ibn Maslama was of the Aus tribe who were resident in Medina, he succeeded in convincing him that he meant him no harm. His own foster-brother Abu Na`ilah who was also one of the group was even more persuasive in using dishonest tactics to lure him unsuspectingly into the darkness:

He said: I am Abu Na`ilah, and I have come to inform you that the advent of this man (the Prophet) is a calamity for us. The Arabs are fighting with us and they are shooting with one bow (i.e. they are united against us). We want to keep away from him (the Prophet). (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.36)

The same biographer records that these men had claimed that they had come to visit him purely to purchase dates and food. When Ka`b was lured into talking freely with them and was "pleased with them and became intimate with them" (op.cit., p.37), they came closer to him on the pretext that they wished to smell his perfume. Drawing near to him, they suddenly drew their swords and thrust him through and, having killed him, they immediately returned to Muhammad uttering the *takbir* ("Allahu Akbar" – Allah is Most Great). Muhammad's reception of them is recorded in this narrative:

When they reached the Apostle of Allah, Allah bless him; he said (Your) faces be lucky. They said: Yours too, O Apostle of Allah! They cast his head before him. He (the Prophet) praised Allah on his being slain. When it was morning, he said: Kill every Jew whom you come across. The Jews were frightened, so none of them came out, nor did they speak. They were afraid that they would be suddenly attacked as Ibn Ashraf was attacked in the night. (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.37)

This whole affair has an atmosphere of conspiracy and intrigue, of deception and treachery, of murder and assassination. Muslim writers, in trying to clear Muhammad of blame in the whole sordid affair, have used a number of arguments in his defence. At times Muhammad's own part in it has been totally ignored and it has been suggested that it was solely the reaction of some of his companions to Ka`b's false accusations against the Muslim women of Medina that led to the offence while others have argued that Ka`b was legally "executed" by the Prophet for treason against him. Legal terminology has been used to justify his action by saying that a just sentence had been performed upon a traitor who, of necessity, was summarily despatched in a swift and secret execution. The clandestine murder of the poet under cover of darkness is rationalised as an attempt to execute him silently and without any fuss rather than in a public execution which might attract unwanted attention. It has also been argued that Muhammad had already decreed that deception was an art in warfare and, as Ka`b had declared war on the Muslims by stirring up opposition to them, the lies of his murderers were vindicated as a legitimate strategy in disposing of him.

It is hard to view the incident as anything other than a coldblooded murder to further the aims of a man who, at this stage, was anything but the undisputed ruler of Medina. The lies which accompanied it, sanctioned as they were by the Prophet, merely aggravate his culpability and the defences raised by Muslim writers seem to be nothing more than expedient attempts to acquit him from what otherwise appear to be severe blemishes on his character. The band of assassins creeping through the darkness to unleash their swords against an unsuspecting foe hardly fit the role of executioners legally commissioned to despatch a criminal properly condemned after a proper trial in the spirit of true justice.

Yet another defence of Muhammad's action has been raised, namely that a traitor is no more than an outlaw who can be killed by anyone without any special authority. When one considers that Ka`b never swore allegiance to Muhammad's cause at any time it is hard to see how he could be accused of being a traitor. Nonetheless the licence to all and sundry to lynch anyone suspected of being a renegade does tend to give a more realistic picture

of what really happened that night than the legal euphemisms of others who would acquit the Prophet of Islam of being an accomplice in murder and falsehood.

THE SLAUGHTER OF OTHER OPPONENTS OF THE PROPHET

The story of Ka'b ibn Ashraf does not stand alone. Numerous other Arabs who ventured to withstand Muhammad were cunningly murdered once he had an opportunity to despatch them. Another Jew named Abu Rafi, who was one of the chiefs of a Jewish tribe, the Banu Nadhir, was also killed in much the same way. After being exiled from Medina he moved to Khaibar north of the city and what happened to him is once again set out in bland language in the early records of Islam. This account is one of many in the Hadith literature outlining the event:

Narrated Al-Bara: Allah's Apostle sent Abdullah bin Atik and Abdullah bin Utba with a group of men to Abu Rafi (to kill him) ... (Abdullah said) "I called, 'O Abu Rafi!' He replied 'Who is it?' I proceeded towards the voice and hit him. He cried loudly but my blow was futile. Then I came to him, pretending to help him, saying with a different tone of voice, 'What is wrong with you, O Abu Rafi?' He said 'Are you not surprised? Woe on your mother! A man has come to me and hit me with a sword!' So again I aimed at him and hit him, but the blow proved futile again, and on that Abu Rafi cried loudly and his wife got up. I came again and changed my voice as if I was a helper, and found Abu Rafi lying straight on his back, so I drove the sword into his belly and bent on it till I heard the sound of a bone break." (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, pp.253,254)

The story has much the same character as the assassination of Ka'b ibn Ashraf. Once again the coldblooded murder of Muhammad's enemy was accomplished with pretence and deceit. Another record of the incident adds that, when Abu Rafi's wife enquired who they were, they replied that they were simply a group of "Arabs in search of supplies" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.483).

It is significant to find that most of the individuals despatched at Muhammad's instance were those who had composed satirical legends against him or had invented poetic passages to rival the text of the Qur'an. It seems that the Prophet of Islam could not tolerate a challenge to his claim to be a divinely-inspired messenger. Mention has already been made of An-Nadr ibn al-Harith who was put to death after the Battle of Badr for having formerly ridiculed the Qur'an and reciting Persian legends in their stead which he claimed were more beautiful than Muhammad's oracles. Although the Qur'an boldly invites anyone who challenges its authenticity to produce similar passages to rival it (*Surah 11:13*), Muhammad appears to have been severely troubled when some of his opponents set out to do just that.

Al-Harith ibn Suwayd ibn Samit was another opponent murdered at Muhammad's instigation. This set off something of a chain reaction. One Abu Afak, annoyed at the incident, composed a satire defending the ancestors of those who were disaffected at the Prophet which prompted him to respond "Who will deal with this rascal for me?" at which another of his companions, Salim ibn `Umayr, went forth and slaughtered him. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.675). In reply to this `Asma bint Marwan, another resident of Medina disenchanted with Islam, composed a satire charging her fellow-townsmen of the Aus and Khazraj "You obey a stranger who is none of yours ... Is there no man of pride who would attack him by surprise and cut off the hopes of those who expect aught from him?" When Muhammad heard this he said "Who will rid me of Marwan's daughter?" at which `Umayr ibn `Adiy al-Khatmi immediately crept into her house and murdered her. On his return he confirmed that he had killed her at which Muhammad was greatly pleased and said to him "You have greatly helped God and his Apostle, O `Umayr!" (op. cit., p.676).

After the conquest of Khaibar a local traitor cowardly told Muhammad that he knew where his master Kinana had a large sum of money concealed. The search yielded only a little at which the Prophet weakly allowed az-Zubayr to torture him to disclose the place where the rest was hidden. Two pieces of very hot wood were applied to Kinana's chest so forcefully that he fainted from the ordeal. The pressure did not result in the disclosure of the rest of the money, however, and when the Prophet saw that nothing was being gained he had him decapitated.

A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE OF MUHAMMAD'S INTRIGUES

Little argument is needed to persuade an objective reader that the Prophet of Islam thought little of murdering his opponents in clandestine circumstances and using deceitful means to achieve his aims. Muslims have done all they can to vindicate him but, from a Christian perspective, he cannot escape the most severe censure. During his

own lifetime Jesus addressed this sort of behaviour quite unambiguously when, considering the devil, he said:

"He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, because he is a liar and the father of lies". *John 8:44*

The records of most of these incidents state that the murders of such opponents of the Prophet usually took place at night. On each occasion the assassins did everything they could to keep their identity hidden and their actions concealed. The Christian Bible states its own impressions as to why such deeds are performed under cover of darkness:

Men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. *John 3:19-20*

It is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret. *Ephesians 5:12*

Muslim writers often argue that such actions were typical of those practised by most military leaders in wartime as understood by the nations of the world. This leads, however, to a key question. Is the Prophet of Islam to be judged (and acquitted) purely by the standards of his own time or, having boldly claimed to be the greatest of all divinely commissioned men throughout all human history, is he to be assessed by the absolute standards set forth by the human figure of Jesus Christ who preceded him? It does appear that Muhammad's designs on his enemies can only be justified by relative standards and that he cannot escape the censure of Christian morality.

When Muhammad discovered that neither the Jews nor the Christians were going to respond to his claims he became very angry with them and the Qur'an declares *Qaatalahumullaah* meaning "Allah curse them!" (*Surah 9:30*) Jesus was also confronted often with people who would not receive him yet, when his disciples wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume a group of Samaritans who had refused to receive him, he replied:

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them". *Luke 9:55*

Jesus taught that love for one's fellow-man was to be so impartial that it was to extend even to one's foes: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you" (*Luke 6:27-28*). Indeed when Jesus chose to show just what true love is in a parable just after this, he chose a Samaritan as the hero of the story (*Luke 10:33*). Most importantly Jesus himself put his own teaching into practice and, when he was finally unjustly crucified by his staunchest foes, instead of seeking to condemn them, he prayed "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (*Luke 23:34*).

For all his greatness Muhammad's character is very seriously compromised by the stories in the earliest works of Islamic tradition which disclose, in simple narrative form, how he deviously sanctioned the slaughter of his enemies, especially those who did him no other harm than to irk him with their poetic satires. Many of the prophets of Old Testament times can be shown to have acted just as callously at times but this does not exonerate Muhammad. Between those prophets and his era stands a new dawn in human history when the man Jesus Christ projected a perfect human character and fulfilled God's revealed purposes for mankind once and for all. Muhammad shows himself to be as much in need of the redeeming work of God's Saviour as any other person in history – he cannot really be compared with him as God's final representative on earth.

3. HIS RELATIONSHIPS WITH JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

THE PROPHET AND THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

One of the remarkable things about Muhammad's mission was his conviction that he had been called to be a prophet in the line of the great prophets of old who established the Judeo-Christian heritage. This required a deliberate break from the general pagan idolatry of the Arabs and, as has been seen, he found his own people bitterly opposed to him for many years. Yet to him the Jews and Christians had something the Arabs had never possessed – a scripture sent from God. The Jews had the *Tawraat*, the "Law" which he presumed was a book sent to Moses, while the Christians had the *Injil*, the "Gospel" which he likewise believed was a book sent to Jesus. He called them both *Ahl al-Kitab*, the "People of the Book" and considered himself to be the final prophet who

had received his own scripture, *al-Qur'an*, "the Recitation".

Muhammad's conviction that he was called into the line of the true prophets sent from God as recorded in these scriptures was so strong that he accepted their teachings and prophecies without doubting their basic contents. The numerous records of wondrous signs and miracles in these scriptures was not questioned, even though he was sorely pressed when challenged by the pagan Arabs at Mecca to work a few wonders himself. When their persecution grew particularly severe at the time of his exile to Medina he changed the direction of prayer (the *qiblah*) from Mecca to Jerusalem and made his followers keep the same fasts as the Jews, in particular the fast of Ashura. He did not doubt that they had been specially favoured of God in former times, a fact to which the Qur'an constantly calls attention in words reminiscent of Paul's summary in Romans 9:4-5:

O Children of Israel! Remember my favour towards you and fulfil your covenant with me. *Surah 2:40*

We gave the Children of Israel the Scripture, and the Command and the Prophethood, and provided them with good things, and favoured them above the nations. *Surah 45:16*

Having sided with them it was his deepest wish that they should recognise him as God's chosen messenger and confirm his prophetic mission. It seems he was totally unaware that the Jewish scriptures had always taught that God's complete revelation, right down to the coming of the Messiah himself, would be revealed exclusively through their line and that he, being an Arab, could not qualify in terms of their own expectations. He was also obviously ignorant of the many differences between his stories of the lives of the former prophets as recorded in the Qur'an and the similar records in their own scriptures.

Shortly after he arrived at Medina, having at first expected the large Jewish contingent there to follow and endorse him, he discovered that their opposition to him was destined to be far more damaging and a more challenging threat to his credibility than that which he had experienced in Mecca. There the people simply reviled and abused him, here they called the whole integrity of his mission into question. Muhammad was frustrated as he could not read their scriptures and the Jews took keen advantage of this, provoking him with their knowledge while at the same time concealing things from him with subtle twists and phrases which he could not detect but which entertained the Jewish bystanders.

In Exodus 24:7 the Israelites at Sinai are said to have answered Moses "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient" but the Qur'an states that, when they were called on to obey God's law on the Mount, they responded "We hear and we disobey" (*Surah 2:93*). It was only sometime later that Muhammad found that he had been misled at this point and the Qur'an rebukes them for their deception:

Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their places and they say "We hear and we disobey". *Surah 4:46*

It was too late, however, to remedy the error that they had been instrumental in introducing to the text of the Qur'an and incidents like these tried Muhammad sorely so that his attitude towards them became intensely hostile. By claiming that there were factual errors and false statements in the Qur'an the Jews threatened to undermine the whole foundation of his mission and his recourse was to drive them out of Medina and attack them with invectives from the Qur'an. A typical example of his response to their charges reads:

The Jews say "God's hand is tied up". May their hands be tied up and may they be cursed for what they declare ... Among them we have placed enmity and hatred to the Day of Judgment. Every time they light the fire of war, Allah does extinguish it for they always strive to do evil on earth, and Allah does not love evildoers. *Surah 5:67*

You will find those strongest in hostility to the believers to be the Jews and the Hypocrites. *Surah 5:85*

Throughout Muhammad's final years at Medina the mutual hostility between him and the Jews constantly increased. Many of the records of the Jews in the early biographies disclose this enmity quite openly. One biographer has a tradition that, while Muhammad was still in his childhood, the Jews tried to kill him because they feared he would become a prophet. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.125). Another similar record reviles them equally emphatically:

About this time the Jewish rabbis showed hostility to the apostle in envy, hatred and malice, because God had chosen His apostle from the Arabs. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulullah*, p.239)

A brief survey of the manner in which Muhammad dealt with the three Jewish tribes settled in the environs of Medina will show just how deep the enmity was.

MUHAMMAD'S CONFLICT WITH THE JEWS AT MEDINA

Muhammad's victory at the Battle of Badr gave him an opportunity to move against the *Banu Qaynuqa* who were settled near the city. He boldly challenged them in the marketplace to acknowledge that he was God's chosen prophet to prevent a similar disaster coming on them as that which befell the Quraysh. They replied that he should not deceive himself because he got the better of an ignorant people. They were real men which he would soon discover if he fought them. Undaunted he accused them of breaking their agreements with him and besieged their quarter until they surrendered unconditionally. `Abdullah ibn Ubayy came and pleaded with him not to put them summarily to death and he finally relented, forcing them instead to leave the city. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.363).

After the Battle of Uhud Muhammad moved in similar fashion against the *Banu Nadhir*, another Jewish tribe living in their own quarter near Medina. He claimed that they were plotting to kill him and, mindful of the fate of the Banu Qaynuqa, they prepared to leave as well until `Abdullah ibn Ubayy and others persuaded them to stay, promising them their support. Fifteen days siege resulted with no assistance, however, and the Prophet ordered his companions to cut down their datepalms. The Jews in the quarter cried out to him:

"Muhammad, you have prohibited wanton destruction and blamed those guilty of it. Why then are you cutting down and burning our palm-trees?" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.437)

In fact Muhammad's action was directly contrary to the command of God in the Bible to his people never to wield the axe against the trees of any city they might be warring against or besieging. They were allowed to eat the fruit of these trees but not to cut them down (*Deuteronomy 20:19*). It appears that he was aware of this passage as a tradition records that, immediately after cutting down the datepalms at a place called al-Buwaira, a verse of the Qur'an was revealed justifying the action (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.242). The text reads:

Whether you cut down the tender palmtrees or left them standing on their roots, it was by leave of Allah to shame the transgressors. *Surah 59:5*

The Banu Nadhir were exiled like their compatriots and they settled at the Jewish stronghold of Khaibar to the north of Medina. The *Banu Quraydhah* were the last to go, once again being dealt with shortly after one of Muhammad's major confrontations with the Quraysh from Mecca, this time the ill-fated Battle of the Ditch. While Medina was being besieged by the Confederate army the Jews from this tribe on the eastern side of the city entered into an agreement with the Quraysh to allow them access to the city through their quarter. The Muslims succeeded in sowing distrust between them as the siege continued and, when the Quraysh withdrew, the Jews were helplessly exposed.

Muhammad immediately surrounded their quarter and, after a siege lasting nearly a month, they surrendered, expecting to be exiled as the other two tribes had been. Just as `Abdullah ibn Ubayy had successfully interceded with Muhammad on behalf of the Banu Qaynuqa so al-Aus, an Arab from the tribe to whom the Jews had been allied, pleaded with the Prophet to spare them. Muhammad, however, asked whether they would be satisfied if one of their own tribe pronounced their fate and they agreed. He then appointed one Sa'd ibn Mu'adh who was one of the few Muslims injured in the siege of Medina, a subtle choice in the light of the circumstances. He enquired of the Jews whether they would covenant with Allah to accept his judgment and, when they consented, he asked the same of Muhammad. He then gave his decree: "I give judgement that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.464). Another record of what happened reads as follows:

The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, authorised Sa'd ibn Mu'adh to give a decision about them. He passed an order: He who is subjected to razors (i.e. the male) should be killed, women and children should be enslaved, and the property should be distributed. Thereupon the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: You have decided in confirmation to the judgement of Allah, above the seven heavens. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, returned on Thursday 7 Dhu al-Hijjah. Then he commanded them to be brought into al-Madinah where ditches were dug in the market. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, sat with his Companions and they were brought in small groups. Their heads were struck off. They were between six hundred and seven

hundred in number. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.93)

There is no other record of such a wholesale slaughter of prisoners by the Prophet of Islam and the story's historical credibility has sometimes been challenged by Muslim writers. There is evidence from Ibn Sa'd as well, nonetheless, that he may have intended the same fate for the Banu Qaynuqa as he is said to have tied their hands behind their backs in preparation for beheading before Abdullah, then still too influential to be ignored, dissuaded him (Vol.2, p.32-33). It is perhaps the sheer horror of considering the decapitation and mass burial of so many (the executions are said to have gone on until evening) that makes some Muslims recoil at the record of the event, though others who accept its veracity argue that it was the divine command of Allah against a traitorous people that vindicated their fate. The Qur'an states that it was indeed Allah himself who cast terror into their hearts so that the Muslims might kill them and take possession of their lands, houses and goods (*Surah 33:26*).

Not long after this he attacked the Jewish fortress at Khaibar and although he did not conquer it, he brought it into subjection to his rule. At the end of his life he gave instructions to `Umar, his second successor, to ensure that all Jews were expelled from the Arabian Peninsula and, in due time, the Caliph duly drove them out.

MUHAMMAD'S CONTACTS WITH THE CHRISTIANS OF ARABIA

His contacts with the Christians of the Hijaz were infrequent compared with his regular interactions with the Jews. They were far fewer in number and were loosely scattered in small groups throughout the Arabian Peninsula. His experience with the Negus of Abyssinia made him far more favourable towards them and for a long time he regarded them as potential friends and allies. Indeed the Qur'an states, in contrast with its attitude toward the Jews:

Nearest among them in love to the believers will you find those who say "We are Christians", because among them are men devoted to learning, those who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant. *Surah 5:85*

The Qur'an often takes a most favourable attitude towards the Christians. It predicted a Byzantine victory over the Persians which would "make the believers rejoice" (*Surah 30:4*), it brings forward the early Christians and others recently killed at Yemen as examples of faithful men, it commends many of their monks and priests and rejoices at the preservation of monasteries and churches from destruction "where Allah's name is ceaselessly invoked" (*Surah 22:40*).

As time went on, however, Muhammad's good pleasure turned into deep antagonism as the Christians, like the Jews, refused to accept him as a prophet and challenged the authenticity of the Qur'an. A gathering from the Christian settlement at Najran openly queried certain difficulties in the book, in particular the title given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The Qur'an states that her companions addressed her as *Ya ukhta Harun* – "O Sister of Aaron!" (*Surah 19:28*). The Qur'an gives her the same name, *Maryam*, as the Bible gives to the real sister of Aaron, namely Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and the confusion of the two names led this party to confront Muhammad with serious errors in the content of his book.

Mughira ibn Shu'ba reported: When I came to Najran, they (i.e. the Christians of Najran) asked me: You read "O sister of Harun" (i.e. Hadrat Maryam) in the Qur'an, whereas Moses was born much before Jesus. When I came back to Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) I asked him about that, whereupon he said: The people (of the old age) used to give names (to their persons) after the names of Apostles and pious persons who had gone before them. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.1169)

Nothing irritated the Prophet more than a challenge to his own prophetic credibility. It seems he had only a limited knowledge of Christianity and neither he nor his companions appears to have had a grasp of basic Christian doctrines. The crucifixion of Jesus is mentioned only once in the Qur'an as an insult of the Jews (*Surah 4:157*) and there is not a hint in the book of the Christian belief in the atonement arising from it. Yet the Qur'an freely gives Jesus the title *al-Masih* – "the Messiah" (*Surah 4:171*) without any explanation of it, least of all an awareness of its atoning character. As time went on Muhammad must have experienced similar frustrations with the Christians to those which he had with the Jews and the Qur'an's approach to them becomes quite hostile at times:

O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians as your friends and protectors, they are but friends

and protectors to each other ... do not take for friends and protectors those who make a mockery or sport of your religion, whether from those who received the Scripture before you or from those who reject faith. *Surah 5:54,60*

In his final years, as his armies clashed with Byzantine forces to the north of Medina, Muhammad's hostility towards the Christians reached its peak. The Qur'an reviles them as speaking *kufir* (blasphemy) against Allah for believing in the divinity of Christ and for a belief in a threefold deity (*Surah 5:75-76*), a charge usually directed only at pagan idolaters. The Prophet's last recorded words reveal the intensity of his rejection of the People of the Book by the end of his life:

It has been narrated by `Umar b. al-Khattab that he heard the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) say: I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.965)

`Umar b. Abd al-Aziz reported that the last statement made by the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) was: O Lord, perish the Jews and the Christians. They made churches of the graves of their Prophets. Beware, there should be no two faiths in Arabia. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.371)

The die was cast between Islam and the other two faiths to whose heritage it attached itself. To this day the Muslim attitude towards both faiths remains one of suspicion, distrust and general hostility. Perhaps Muhammad never understood the cause of their refusal to recognise him and as a result of this Islam historically has established itself in opposition to its predecessors rather than alongside them.

4. EVALUATING MUHAMMAD'S MANY MARRIAGES

THE WIVES OF THE PROPHET AT MEDINA

Shortly before his emigration to Medina Muhammad lost *Khadija*, his only wife at Mecca. The marriage had been a sound and happy one and had lasted twenty-five years. Her death, however, was to cause a total change in his home life so that a growing number of wives were to be added until there were at least nine at the time of his death in his adopted city some twelve years later.

His first new marriage was to *Sauda bint Zam`ah*, a woman who had a son and who had escaped to Abyssinia during the persecution of the early Muslims in Mecca. She was already more than thirty years of age and by the standards of her day was regarded as beyond the years when most women would marry but, as Muhammad was already over fifty, she was young enough for him. At this time he also attached himself to the very young *Ayishah* who was said to be only nine years old at the time. She was the daughter of his close companion Abu Bakr and the arrangement may have been made partly to cement their close ties according to Arab custom. Nonetheless she became his favourite wife and was the only one of his wives not to have been previously married. She was, despite her youth, a fiery woman who became the source of a minor scandal at Medina. She was left behind during a journey back to the city and was eventually brought in alone by one of the Prophet's companions, Safwan of Mecca. The mere association of one of his wives with another man created suspicions and rumours and even the Prophet himself kept aloof from her for a while. It took a revelation in the Qur'an (*Surah 24:11-20*) to justify her innocence but she was considerably displeased at her husband's initial reluctance to stand by her. As time went on she grew in stature and was said to be a highly intelligent woman. A great number of the early traditions of the Prophet are attributed to her and one of the early Muslims is said to have described her character in these words:

I have not seen anyone having more knowledge of the *sunnah* (practice) of the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, than Ayishah, nor more intelligent in opinion if her opinion was sought, or having better knowledge of the verses as to what they were revealed about, or in calculating the *fara'id* (inheritance). (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.481)

His next wife was *Hafsah*, once again the daughter of one of his closest companions, in this case `Umar. Her husband was one of the few Muslims who had been killed at the Battle of Badr and the marriage once again seems to have been one motivated not by desire but by consideration for her personal circumstances. She and Ayishah, both by far the youngest of his wives, became close friends. His next two wives were *Umm Salamah* and *Zaynab bint Khuzaymah*, the latter passing away within three months of her marriage. Then followed *Juwayriyah* of the Banu Khuza`ah. Her whole tribe had been captured in a raid and it was only her marriage

which resulted in the tribe being released without any consequences. By this time Ayishah was becoming disturbed at the increasing number of marital apartments being added to the Prophet's common home and she was obviously persuaded that in this case the cause of the marriage was the natural attraction of a man to a good-looking woman. She commented:

She was a most beautiful woman. She captivated every man who saw her. She came to the Apostle to ask his help in the matter. As soon as I saw her at the door of my room I took a dislike for her, for I knew that he would see her as I saw her. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.493)

Ayishah, whose tongue was as sharp as her wit, concluded "I do not know a woman who was a greater blessing to her people than she". After this Muhammad married *Zaynab bint Jahsh* and *Mariyah*, an Egyptian slave woman of Coptic origins. Then came the daughter of Abu Sufyan, *Umm Habibah* and a Jewess *Safiya* whose father Huyayy, husband Kinanah and both her brothers were killed by the Muslims at Khaibar. His last marriage was to a woman named *Maymunah* though it is possible he was also married to another Jewess *Rayhanah*, one of the survivors of the Banu Quraydhah who is known to have "shown repugnance towards Islam when she was captured and clung to Judaism" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.466). Muslim writers often claim that all Muhammad's marriages were the result purely of the Prophet's compassionate desire to protect women bereft of their husbands and they required a personal sacrifice on his part. It should be remembered that his two Jewish consorts only became widows because their husbands had been butchered by the Muslims.

Of all his marriages, however, none evoked more comment than that to his cousin Zaynab bint Jahsh. She was originally the wife of Zaid ibn Haritha, his adopted son, but it appears the marriage soured and Muhammad soon expressed a keen interest in her. Zaid was prepared to divorce her but the Prophet initially dissuaded him. Things did not improve, however, and soon after their separation Muhammad married her, giving her by far the biggest wedding-feast he had given for any of his wives. A scandal soon arose as the Arabs considered a marriage between a father and his adopted son's wife as tantamount to incest. Once again a timely revelation in the Qur'an justified Muhammad's actions:

Behold! You said to one who had received Allah's grace and your favour: "Keep your wife and fear Allah". But you hid in your heart what Allah was about to manifest. You feared the people but you should have feared Allah. Then when Zaid was legally separated from her We joined her to you in marriage in order that the believers may have no difficulty when marrying the wives of their adopted sons when they have properly parted from them. And Allah's command must be fulfilled. *Surah 33:37*

It appears that there was no censure of the Prophet for marrying a divorced woman even though the prospect of her being his wife arose even before she separated from Zaid. Jesus plainly taught that such a union was adulterous in God's eyes (*Luke 16:18*) and he is also recorded as saying that no man should separate couples whom God had joined together (*Mark 10:9*). The Bible views divorce as something God has permitted but which he intensely dislikes and Muhammad himself is said to have endorsed this view:

Ibn `Umar reported the Prophet (may peace be upon him) as saying: Of all the lawful acts the most detestable to Allah is divorce. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.2, p.585)

Nonetheless the Qur'anic decree that it was Allah himself who had willed the marriage was sufficient to satisfy Muhammad's companions and it is said that Zaynab used to taunt his other wives with the retort that her marriage alone to the Prophet was said by the Qur'an to have been made in heaven.

THE JEALOUSY OF MUHAMMAD'S WIVES

Although the Qur'an only allows Muslims to have up to four wives at a time (*Surah 4:3*) and only on the condition that they be treated equally, Muhammad was given permission to take as many as he chose until a revelation finally forbade him to have any more (*Surah 33:52*). Muslim writers justify their Prophet's polygamy by not only claiming that his marriages were all of convenience to protect weakened women but also by saying that he always treated them with equal care and respect. One would not expect to find any jealousy between them if this were so but the records of his life include a number of incidents where it is clear that they often clashed with one another.

It appears that his marriage with Zaynab bint Jahsh was the chief cause of jealousy between them and an incident

is recorded in his life where Ayishah and Hafsa are said to have colluded in obliging him to decrease the attention he was paying to her. The narrative reads:

Narrated Aisha: Allah's Apostle used to drink honey in the house of Zainab, the daughter of Jahsh, and would stay there with her. So Hafsa and I agreed secretly that, if he come to either of us, she would say to him: "It seems you have eaten Maghafir (a kind of bad-smelling resin), for I smell in you the smell of Maghafir". We did so and he replied "No, but I was drinking honey in the house of Zainab, the daughter of Jahsh, and I shall never take it again. I have taken an oath as to that, and you should not tell anybody about it". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.404)

The Prophet is said to have greatly appreciated perfumes and sweet-smelling spices but despised garlic and other similar herbs, so their complaint must have been very sensitive to him. Bukhari states that this incident was the cause of a later revelation in the Qur'an which gave Muhammad the right to revoke such oaths:

O Prophet! Why to forbid what Allah has made lawful for you? You seek to please your wives. But Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Allah has already ordained for you the dissolution of your oaths, and Allah is your Protector, full of knowledge and wisdom. *Surah 66:1-2*

It seems appropriate to comment on the concession made to the Prophet in the Qur'an at this point. The Bible regards the taking of oaths as a matter of great seriousness as it is the very appeal to God himself as a witness that makes a testimony credible. "When you make a vow to the Lord your God you shall not be slack to pay it; for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you" (*Deuteronomy 23:21-23*). This verse in the Qur'an appears to be a convenient relaxation of this principle purely to enable the Prophet to change his mind.

The same verse is also said to relate to another incident where `Umar boldly challenged his daughter on hearing that there were times of considerable friction and tension between the Prophet and his wives. `Umar had been arguing with his own wife one day and was particularly annoyed that she had the temerity to interfere and give him advice contrary to his own opinion. Her retort led to him discovering that Muhammad himself was being challenged by his own wives and that they thought nothing of openly expressing disagreement with him whenever occasion arose to do so:

She said, "How strange you are, O son of al-Khattab! You don't want to be argued with whereas your daughter, Hafsa surely, argues with Allah's Apostle so much that he remains angry for a full day!" 'Umar then reported how he at once put on his outer garment and went to Hafsa and said to her "O my daughter, Do you argue with Allah's Apostle so that he remains angry the whole day?" Hafsa answered "By Allah, we argue with him". `Umar said "Know that I warn you of Allah's punishment and the anger of Allah's Apostle. O my daughter! Don't be betrayed by the one who is proud of her beauty because of the love of Allah's Apostle for her (i.e. Aisha)". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.406)

This story indicates that, notwithstanding their close friendship and their inclination at times to jointly conspire against Muhammad's other wives, there was even jealousy between Ayishah and Hafsa. Ayishah was known to be his favourite wife and `Umar was most concerned that his daughter should not envy her. In addition to this, however, they are even found conspiring against Muhammad himself on occasion and the Qur'an speaks quite sharply against their intrigues:

And when the Prophet disclosed a matter in confidence to one of his wives and she disclosed it and Allah made this known to him, he confirmed a part of it and repudiated a part of it. ... If the two of you turn in repentance to Him, your hearts are indeed so inclined, but if you conspire together against him, truly Allah is his Protector. *Surah 66:3-4*

Ibn Abbas, one of Muhammad's companions, stated that he had hardly finished asking `Umar who these two were who had backed each other against the Prophet when he replied that they were Ayishah and Hafsa (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.408). Indeed the tension between the Prophet and his wives was so great at times that it appears that on one particular occasion he even gave thought to divorcing them all at once. The Qur'an warns them:

It may be, if he divorced you all, that Allah would give him in return wives much better than you, who are

submissive, who are truly faithful, devout, repentant, who worship and are willing to travel and fast, whether previously married or not. *Surah 66:5*

This verse is said to have confirmed `Umar's own statement to them that they should not think they could back each other against their husband and think they could escape the consequences. If Allah so wished, he could allow the Prophet to divorce them all and give him better wives in their place (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.410).

On another occasion the Qur'an again sanctioned a desire on Muhammad's part to change his mind about a practice he had hitherto very strongly observed. To treat his wives equally he used to visit each on in turn, spending the whole of each succeeding day with only one of them. A revelation gave him the right to abandon this sequence:

You may defer any one of them as you please, and you may receive any one of them as you please, and there is no blame on you if you invite one whom you have previously set aside. *Surah 33:51*

Some time earlier Ayishah had expressly complained of her jealousy towards those women who had "offered themselves to Allah's Messenger" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.748) and who had gradually increased the size of the household as Muhammad duly took them as wives under Qur'anic authority (*Surah 33:50*). It is probable that she specifically had Juwayriyah and Zaynab bint Jahsh in mind. These additions meant that her own days to enjoy his company grew further apart and, when he claimed divine sanction to revoke his custom and take whomever he wished each day, her frustration made her chasten him with this cutting remark:

"I feel that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your wishes and desires". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.295)

Muhammad's many marriages have long been a source of critical evaluation by Western and Christian scholars. Muslims on the other hand have projected him as the ideal husband, a perfect example and role model who always treated his wives absolutely fairly and justly. They presumably could have had no valid cause of complaint against him at any time yet a brief study of his relationships with them shows that there were ongoing dissensions, conspiracies and jealousies between them all. Far from being an example of how polygamy can work harmoniously the story of Muhammad's marriages tends to reinforce the Biblical ideal of monogamy. It is not a question of whether a man can treat his many wives equally with other, the real question is how he can treat them equally with himself. A wife is called to devote herself with unreserved loyalty to her one husband (*Genesis 3:16*). In the same manner the husband is called to show an equal spirit of undivided love and devotion to his one wife (*Ephesians 5:25-31*). It surely goes without saying that a husband cannot truly reciprocate his wife's total devotion to him if he has to divide his own affections between a host of consorts.

Ayishah's own frustrations and jealousies, notwithstanding her own role as Muhammad's favourite wife, are perhaps the best evidence that he could not treat his wives equally. Her grievances and subtle retorts were motivated, perhaps only subconsciously, by her regret that she was not his *only* wife. There is evidence that she rather than Sauda bint Za`mah was the first woman he married after the death of Khadija (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.748) and if this is so, then her disappointments are readily understandable. She was the only wife of Muhammad who had never been married to anyone else and she obviously regretted that she could not experience and enjoy the same undivided affection she was prepared to give him. Paradoxically her privileged pride of place as Muhammad's favourite wife is also evidence that he did not treat all his wives equally.

There is more than enough evidence in his own marital affairs to suggest that the Biblical ideal of monogamy must be preferred to Muhammad's example of polygamy.

Chapter Four

The Revelation: The Messenger of Allah

1. IQRA! – THE CALL TO PROPHETHOOD

MUHAMMAD'S CONTEMPLATIONS ON MOUNT HIRA

Islam, like Judaism and Christianity before it, is founded on the principle that there is one Supreme Being who created the whole universe and who has revealed his will, his laws and his truth through the medium of human messengers. Yet whereas the former two faiths are based on a progressive revelation through prophets called out from only one nation, the Israelites, Islam is unique in that its founder was an Arab from a people who had hitherto never known such a vocation and had been steeped in traditional pagan idolatry.

It is necessary to consider the whole course of Muhammad's experience of revelation to understand the heart and spirit of the Muslim faith. Of prime importance is an awareness of how he was prepared for it and what led him to the conviction that he was singled out as one of God's great messengers to mankind. There is a remarkable paradox at this point for he began his religious quest, not as an aspirant to prophetic office but rather as a somewhat mystical enquirer in the mould of oriental visionaries before him.

It is known that for some time he used to retire to Mount Hira outside Mecca to contemplate the meaning of life in undisturbed solitude. Here he was able to reflect and, without fear of social retribution, to doubt and question the beliefs of his own people. Down below he was accustomed to a bustling society where hundreds of people from all over Arabia mixed with each other in their daily lives. That, to any ordinary man, was the simple reality of life. The universe above and the earth below had no real relevance apart from the incessant activity of human and other forms of life on the surface of the earth. The worship of idols accordingly seemed to be entirely appropriate. Fashioned in images similar to the human frame, this multiplicity of deities seemed to be eminently consistent with life as men and women knew it.

High up on Mount Hira, as he searched the broad, silent horizons before him, things began to appear to be somewhat different to the seeker who, although in the prime of his life at the age of forty years, had determined to seek the true meaning of his existence. Up here the bustle of human traffic below seemed small and insignificant. If he could see them below at all, his people might have appeared more like ants than men. At the same time their idols began to seem equally negligible. From this distance they could not even be seen and Muhammad must surely have wondered if their existence was not simply the result of the imagination of those who worshipped them. As he scanned the horizon, however, he must have been impressed rather with an immense serenity, a tranquil silence stretching into the heavens in a realm far beyond the human scope of perception.

The haunting solitude and dramatic sense of an absolute unity of existence throughout the universe must have made him wonder whether there was not some other source of life. Pagan idols were all too human in form and number – must there not surely be some far greater Being beyond the earth who looked down on it in awesome solitude as Muhammad himself now did? A great and almost lonely God in eternal isolation from the physical worlds he had created below him?

This time of contemplation might have led to the rise of another oriental visionary who, at the appropriate time, could descend again to declare that he had finally discovered for himself the meaning of life. Gautama Buddha was just such a man. For a long time he too had retired to a solitary existence and a time of meditation under a chosen tree. The day finally came when he declared his mystical search for truth had finally yielded its light – all life and its trials could be resolved in one proverb, he proclaimed. Desire was the cause of all suffering – subdue your own personal desires and longings and then pain and suffering would have no effect or meaning. Contemplation should ultimately lead to enlightenment and the son of Arab merchants might have been expected to come to the same position in good time. With Muhammad, however, it did not. Assuredly the day came when he descended from Hira with a declaration that his quest was over, but it was not a climax of meditation that brought it, nor was he convinced that his discovery was necessarily beneficial.

His contemplations had been rudely interrupted. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly he had that strange vision of a supernatural being on the horizon. Instead of attaining a state of enlightenment he was boldly confronted with something which he later claimed was far beyond his expectations. The creature faced him no matter which way he turned to escape the phenomenon. It spoke just one word – *Iqra!* – "Recite!" From this moment everything changed for Muhammad. He was not to be an enlightened mystic but a prophet, called from above, from Allah

himself, to reveal his truth to his people.

Yet Muhammad was not at all convinced at first that the vision was divinely commissioned. On the contrary he came down in fear from Mount Hira and told his wife Khadija that he wondered if he had not been visited by a *jinn*, a demonic spirit like those who he believed possessed the mad (*majnun*) poets around him. Was he too to become a crazed soothsayer like the rest of them? An account of his actual experience and immediate reaction reads as follows:

The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, was terrified. Whenever he raised his head towards the heaven he saw him; so he returned hastily to Khadijah and conveyed this information to her. He said; O Khadijah! By Allah, I never hated anything so much as idols and soothsayers, and I am afraid that I shall myself become a soothsayer ... O Khadijah! I hear sounds and see light and I fear I am mad. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.225)

He was seized with anguish and, when the second similar vision occurred sometime later, he again came down in terror, crying to her to cover him up, a sign that he feared he was being demonically assaulted. He was assured, however, that it was Allah himself, the one Supreme Being of the whole universe who had visited him, and from that time it is said that "the revelation was speeded up and followed rapidly" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.99). Over the next twenty-three years he never again had such a vision but the Qur'an consistently grew in content as the revelation came to him in dreams and other ways.

THE ABSOLUTE CHARACTER OF REVELATION IN ISLAM

It does not appear that the genuineness of those early visions can be questioned. An impostor would more likely have had a constant recourse to such manifestations but the very fact that Muhammad never again made such claims testifies to the sincerity of the initial experiences. They were unique and out of character and the Qur'an itself emphasises the reality of what he perceived.

While he was in the highest part of the horizon, then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of only two bow-lengths or even nearer. So the revelation came to His servant, what He revealed. His heart in no way falsified what he saw. Will you then dispute with him about what he saw? *Surah 53:7-12*

The reality of his visions is supported as well by his initial reaction to them. Had he conceived them in his own mind as a fantasy to justify his prophetic aspirations he would assuredly have given them divine sanction from the start, but his initial fear that they were of diabolical origin gives much credit to the authenticity of his experience. On the other hand, while admitting the sincerity of his claims, the Christian is entitled to question the origin of the visions in the light of his own first impressions.

To question the revelation in any way for the Muslim, on the other hand, is to contemplate the unthinkable. There is so much in that first command – *Iqra!* – that tempers the whole character of Islam. "Recite!" was the order. Muhammad was bewildered at first as to the meaning of the command until its purpose was made clear: "Repeat after me!" Then he got the message – he was simply to repeat everything he heard. The very title of his book, *al-Qur'an*, "the Recitation", is derived from that initial decree and so much of the character of Islam flows from it.

It was almost as if the angel, as Islam has it, was saying to him: "You did well to doubt the traditions of your ancestors. Your efforts to find the truth through contemplation and meditation were commendable and your willingness to question idolatry testify to your sincerity. But now the truth comes to you by eternal decree, by the command (*amr*) of Allah, and it would not be appropriate to doubt this. To question in ignorance is acceptable but to doubt what is revealed is an abomination and a sure sign of unbelief. Repeat after me! Simply do as you are commanded!"

This explains the dour, absolute character of the revelation in Islam and the awesome grip it has over its adherents. A true Muslim can never honestly question the divine origin of his faith, not even to possibly strengthen his conviction in the process. *Islam* means submission and a true Muslim, one who submits, displays his sincerity in doing so without question. Faith in Islam is not an adventure into the unknown – it is a simple response to the known, to what is revealed, a placid resignation to what is prescribed without ever daring to intelligently enquire whether it is really God's truth or not. The Qur'an uses the word *amr* on more than a

hundred occasions to emphasise that what is revealed is God's express command to be immediately obeyed (cf. *Surahs 10:24, 16:1, 20:93*). The whole essence of the matter is summed up in this text:

The Truth comes from Allah alone, so be not of those who doubt. *Surah 3:60*

The command not to be one of the doubters, *falaa takum-minal- mumtariin*, occurs regularly in the Qur'an (*Surahs 2:147, 6:114, 10:94*) and it emphasises the nature of true Muslim faith. The basics of Islam are all rigidly prescribed. The five times daily prayers are defined in every respect. The call to prayer is the same every day, the ritual of ablutions is likewise always exactly the same every time a Muslim goes to mosque, and each *raka`at* in the mosque, the prayer ceremony, is an exact repetition of the previous one. Every ritual in the Hajj Pilgrimage to Mecca is precisely defined and the observance of the Ramadan fast likewise never changes. The repetitive nature of the practices of Islam is derived directly from that first command, *Iqra'!*, and the true Muslim just repeats what has been revealed without ever having to think about it or being allowed to question it. In the Qur'an Abraham is simply commanded *Aslim!* ("Submit!") and his reply is merely to respond *aslamtu* ("I have submitted") (*Surah 2:131*). Such is Muslim faith. Islam cannot comprehend an Abraham who, in the Bible, challenges and questions the command of God when he decrees he is about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because such an action seemed to him to be in conflict with the very character of God whom he knew to be just and righteous (*Genesis 18:23-25*). To argue with God, as Moses also did (*Exodus 31:11-12*), is to the Muslim unthinkable.

The contemplative Muhammad immediately changed as the Qur'an began to be revealed to him. Unlike Buddha he did not thereafter believe that the transcendental life was the object of religious reform, nor was he concerned with a mystical adventure into the depth of the Divine Spirit. His religion was basically practical with commands about everyday life and his office always remained one of being the recipient and never the discoverer of truth. That first vision and the striking force of its first command to simply repeat what was to be revealed characterises the whole spirit of Islam down to this day.

2. MUHAMMAD'S EXPERIENCE OF THE REVELATION

THE EXOTERIC NATURE OF HIS PROPHETIC INSPIRATION

After his initial visions the Qur'an is said to have come in various ways to Muhammad. There are numerous records to indicate that the addition of any portion of the book was invariably accompanied by a form of outward manifestation. Ayishah detailed some of these forms in the following tradition:

Verily, al-Harith Ibn Hisham said: O Apostle of Allah! How does revelation dawn upon you? The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: Sometimes it dawns upon me in the form of the ringing of a bell, and that is very hard on me; (ultimately) it ceases and I remember what is said. Sometimes the angel appears to me and speaks and I recollect what he says. Ayishah said: I witnessed the revelation dawning upon him on an extremely cold day; when it ceased, I noticed that his forehead was perspiring. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.228)

There are numerous references in the Hadith literature to the actual appearance of the angel, identified later in his life as *Jibril* (Gabriel), and most of these state that he appeared in human form to the Prophet. The Qur'an, however, clearly limits his actual visions to the first two occasions when he claimed to have had a striking manifestation of the angel filling the sky all around him and it is not clear exactly what sort of revelation of the angel is intended. It may be simply that he saw him in a dream or subconscious state in an ethereal form but it is obvious that he was persuaded that it was one specific supernatural being that was so regularly communicating with him. Another record of his early experiences mentions other external manifestations:

Ubada b. Samit reported that when *wahi* descended upon Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him), he felt a burden on that account and the colour of his face underwent a change. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1248)

Another record of these manifestations mentions other outward signs seen by one of his companions: "The Prophet's face was red and he kept on breathing heavily for a while and then he was relieved" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.476). If all these records are correct then there appears to be strong support for the claim that he was experiencing definite states of personal transformation as the various texts of the revelation came to him. Muslims will immediately claim that these prove that his Qur'an was no flight of fancy or a forged composition

subtly contrived in his own imagination from day to day. It was, they claim, Allah's own revelation of his divine word which the Prophet was receiving.

There are evidences in the early records of his life, however, which indicate that he used to lapse into states of semi-consciousness and be overcome by fits long before the start of his prophetic mission. Mention has already been made of an incident in which he experienced a fit while in the care of Halima, his foster mother, while he was still a boy. She and her husband were deeply alarmed as it was believed that evil spirits were the cause of such trances and they determined to return him to his real mother as soon as they possibly could. Halima's own record of this occasion reads:

His father said to me, "I am afraid that this child has had a stroke, so take him back to his family before the result appears". So we picked him up and took him to his mother who asked why we had brought him when I had been anxious for his welfare and desirous of keeping him with me. I said to her 'God has let my son live so far and I have done my duty. I am afraid that ill will befall him, so I have brought him back to you as you wished'. She asked me what happened and gave me no peace until I told her. When she asked if I feared a demon possessed him I replied that I did". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.72)

The story has been embellished in Islamic tradition with the kind of typical fantasies that abound around the early years of his life, in particular his birth, so it is not easy to ascertain the exact experience that he had. He is said to have been visited by two men in white clothing who opened up his heart, removed a black spot, cleansed it with snow and closed it up again. In defending his integrity Amina is said to have claimed that she had seen a light go forth from her while she was still pregnant with him till it reached the castles of Busra in Syria. These may all be accretions of later times as throughout the Qur'an the impression given is that his initial visions were the first supernatural evidences that he experienced, but there can be little doubt that they have been woven around a definite incident in his life of which the above quotation gives more than a hint.

It does appear that Muhammad underwent some strange physical changes in his manner and appearance which accompanied the inspiration of the Qur'an text though whether this happened every time a new passage was revealed cannot be determined. It is once again interesting to find that from records within Islam's own early heritage evidences appear to suggest that the source of these manifestations was not immediately presumed to be celestial and that a suspicion of occultic origin was often first suggested.

THE ESOTERIC CHARACTER OF MUHAMMAD'S EXPERIENCES

Muslim writers as a rule have never bothered to enquire whether there was an inward aspect to the revelation. It has always been believed in Islam that the inspiration was entirely external. Muhammad was merely the passive recipient of a divine text inscribed long before his time in the eternal realms and which was being delivered to him portion by portion from an eternal original on a heavenly tablet. The angel simply dictated the book to him – his role was to act as the faithful communicator of it. Nothing was believed to have been fashioned or derived from his own impressions, perceptions or opinions. It was a chance inspiration and he had no part in its content or spirit. It was the *Kitabullah*, the Word of God alone without any contribution from the Prophet.

On the other hand the Qur'an is the foremost authority for the Muslim world's knowledge of Muhammad and if it in no way reflects anything of his growing prophetic consciousness it cannot really help anyone to discover the spirit of the man. Biblical prophetic writings abound with divine orations yet they are always recorded in texts either written by the respective prophet about his experiences or by others who never fail to absorb the impact on the prophet himself. If the Qur'an contains no more than a divine oracle handed down to Muhammad it surely leaves a wide gap between the character of the divine nature on the one hand and the consciousness of the human spirit on the other. There is evidence from the Qur'an to suggest that there was a very definite subjective element in the book's composition. Many of its passages tend to indicate that their final form was a codification of certain striking perceptions he experienced which he firmly believed were being revealed to him by external sources. The final text, however, may well have been a record in his own words of the inspiration he was receiving.

It is perhaps in that very word "inspiration" that one finds the heart of the matter. The usual Qur'anic word for its own revelation is *wahi*, a word which does not really indicate a dictated communication. It appears both as a noun and verb in the following verse:

It is no less than an inspiration which is being revealed to him. *Surah 53:4*

The original Arabic text of the verse states simply that it is "an inspiration inspired", emphasis being made by using the same word twice in the text. This word as used in other texts of the Qur'an does not mean something sent down by revelation (the Qur'an usually uses the word *nazzala* to describe this) but rather something suggested or even prompted in the spirit of its subject or instinctively placed in the heart. A very good example of the use of the word in this context in the Qur'an itself appears in this text:

And your Lord taught the bee to construct its cells in hills, in trees and in edifices. *Surah 16:68*

The word used for "taught" in this verse is again *awha*, the verbal form of the noun *wahi*. It surely does not mean that God sent an angel down with a revelation to be dictated to the bee so that it could learn where to build its hives. Rather this instinctive knowledge derives from an inspiration, an impulse within the bee that makes it respond to the purpose for which it was made. So likewise it appears that there was a subjective side to the Prophet's own experience of the Qur'an as one finds many passages where he produces a reasoned response to a critical challenge, a forceful defence of his marital relationships or a logical argument to justify a particular course of action. To deny him any part in this process is to suggest that there was no development or growing maturity in his prophetic consciousness and that he was always spoonfed with the correct approach to any situation.

Muslims nonetheless reject this approach as it opens the door to a suggestion that the Qur'an might well be to some extent a product of Muhammad's own thoughts rather than the express Word of God. To them this appears to question the whole revelation of the Qur'an as any suggestion that their Prophet might have had any part in its composition might well lead to the conclusion that it was ultimately all his own work. There are definitely passages, however, where one finds the Qur'an expressing the mind of Muhammad himself such as this one:

O you who believe! Do not enter the Prophet's houses until leave is given to you for a meal and not while it is still being prepared, but enter when you are invited and, when you have taken your meal, disperse without seeking familiar talk. *Surah 33:53*

This text is said in the Hadith literature to have been revealed as a response to an occasion where Muhammad was irritated at his guests for chatting together and not noticing his displeasure even when he left and entered the room on a number of occasions:

When Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) married Zainab bint Jahsh, he invited the people to a meal. They took the meal and remained sitting and talking. Then the Prophet (showed them) as if he is ready to get up, yet they did not get up. When he noticed that he got up, and the others too, except three persons who kept on sitting. The Prophet came back in order to enter his house, but he went away again. Then they left, whereupon I set out and went to the Prophet to tell him that they had departed, so he came and entered his house. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.297)

There are many other similar texts which are equally subjective and which are characterised in good measure by Muhammad's own personal temperament. There was very definitely an intimate relationship between his inmost personality and the Quran's general character and the dogma that it was mechanically dictated to him appears to miss a most important facet of its own spirit. After Muhammad's death Ayishah was once asked what he was like and she replied that his nature was as the Qur'an. There may have been some external manifestations each time a passage came into being but these would reveal very little about Muhammad himself or his book. It is in his inner spirit and the link between his own insights and the book's striking moods and tones that one will find, perhaps, the real heart of his inspiration.

In no way is it suggested that Muhammad was actually composing the Qur'an or manipulating it to suit himself as he went along. There was at all times a definite link between his own consciousness and what was coming to him and his involvement may well have been purely incidental.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE QUR'ANIC REVELATION

In some passages of the Qur'an one can very clearly see progress in the development in the text where it can hardly be said that the mind of the Prophet, or even the thoughts of some of his companions, has not in some way impressed itself. His close companion 'Umar, for example, on more than one occasion ventured to give him advice on a certain matter and very soon afterwards this advice became part of the revelation. The following

tradition records a few examples:

Narrated Anas: "Umar said, 'I agreed with Allah in three things', or said, 'My Lord agreed with me in three things. I said "O Allah's Apostle! Would that you took the station of Abraham as a place of prayer". I also said, "O Allah's Apostle! Good and bad persons visit you! Would that you ordered the Mothers of the believers to cover themselves with veils". So the Divine Verses of Al-Hijab (i.e. the veiling of the women) were revealed. I came to know that the Prophet had blamed some of his wives so I entered upon them and said "You should either stop (troubling the Prophet) or else Allah will give his Apostle better wives than you". When I came to one of his wives, she said to me, "O Umar! Does Allah's Apostle not have what he could advise his wives with, that you try to advise them?" Thereupon Allah revealed:- "It may be, if he divorced you (all) his Lord will give him instead of you, wives better than you muslims (who submit to Allah) ..." (66:5)'. " (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.11-12)

The first incident mentioned by `Umar refers to an occasion when he and Muhammad were walking around the Ka`aba and the Prophet suddenly stopped and said that he had been made aware that he was standing on the exact spot where the prophet Abraham had prayed after building the structure with the help of his son Ishmael. `Umar then enquired whether it should not be taken as a place of prayer to which Muhammad replied that nothing like this had been revealed to him. Later on that very night, however, he called `Umar out to disclose that the following verse had just been revealed to him:

Remember we made the House a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and take the Station of Abraham as a place of prayer. *Surah 2:125*

The other two occasions refer to similar incidents where portions of the Qur'an were revealed confirming what `Umar himself had just stated or exclaimed. The irony of the situation is found in the timing of each respective revelation. Not only did Allah give Muhammad exactly the same advice as `Umar but he did so almost immediately after the close companion of the Prophet had spoken. His words "My Lord agreed with me in three things" are striking and it seems that his advices in each case struck Muhammad as being particularly sound and, in his own subjective way, he allowed them to crystallise in his mind in the same form as the other revelations were coming to him and accordingly they became part of the Qur'an text in a very short time.

Another typical incident where `Umar's remonstrations with the Prophet led to a Qur'anic revelation corroborating his stance is recorded in the following tradition:

When `Abdullah bin Ubai died, his son `Abdullah bin `Abdullah came to Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) who gave his shirt to him and ordered him to shroud his father in it. Then he stood up to offer the funeral prayer for the deceased, but `Umar bin Al-Khattab took hold of his garment and said, "Do you offer the funeral prayer for him though he was a hypocrite and Allah has forbidden you to ask forgiveness for hypocrites?" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.155)

Muhammad replied that Allah had given him a choice in the matter whether to pray for the forgiveness of hypocrites or not, cautioning him nonetheless that even if he were to ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah would not forgive them (*Surah 9:80*). So he determined that he would ask more than seventy times whereupon they all prayed the funeral prayer over `Abdullah ibn Ubayy's grave but a revelation came to them immediately confirming `Umar's reservations:

Never pray for any of them upon his death, nor stand at his grave, for they have rejected Allah and His Apostle and died in a state of perverse rebellion. *Surah 9:84*

There are many other passages in the Qur'an where revelations came in similar circumstances, or even to suit the event (such texts being known as *al-asbab an-nuzul* – "sent down for the occasion"), and the very occurrence of such phenomena in the Qur'an text strongly supports the impression that much of the composition of the book, if not all of it, was subjective in nature. The traditional dogma that it was simply dictated to the Prophet without any personal involvement on his part in its final compilation does not appear to be well-founded in the circumstances.

3. AL-MI'RAJ: THE NOCTURNAL ASCENSION

THE NIGHT JOURNEY IN THE QUR'AN AND HADITH

Towards the end of Muhammad's days in Mecca just before his relocation to Medina he had a strange experience which he claimed all took place in one night after he had retired to sleep. The Angel Gabriel is said to have summoned him to ride on a celestial beast named *Buraq*. This creature had a horse's body, angel's head and, according to some of the traditional records of the event, a peacock's tail. He was led from the Ka'aba in Mecca on a heavenly journey to the great rock in Jerusalem where the original Jewish Temple stood. From here he is said to have ascended through the heavens, meeting angels and former prophets along the way, until he went alone into the presence of Allah. From there he went down to see the terrors of hell before returning to Mecca.

The reaction of the pagan Arabs was one of ridicule and cynicism. Even his own followers found the story hard to accept as it was out of character with all they had hitherto experienced of his mission. Those who were his closest companions, however, accepted the story implicitly and it is commemorated annually in Islam by the festival of *Lailatul-Mi'raj*, the "Night of the Ascent" which falls on the 27th night of the month of Rajab.

Virtually nothing is said of this event in the Qur'an. Many writers and commentators have sought to interpret *Surah 53:6-18*, a passage which describes a striking vision which Muhammad experienced, as a reference to the Night Ascent, but the passage appears to refer to one of his initial visions at the time when the revelation began. In any event he is said to have recited this *Surah* many years earlier in the company of the Quraysh at Mecca before the emigration to Abyssinia (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.363) so the passage cannot refer to this experience. The only text which definitely alludes to it is this one:

Glory be to Him who took his servant on a night journey from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthestmost Mosque whose precincts We have blessed so that We might reveal to him our signs. *Surah 17:1*

The verse speaks of the Prophet being taken from *Masjid al-Haram*, the "Holy Mosque" meaning the Ka'aba at Mecca, to *Masjid al-Aqsa*, the "Farthestmost Mosque" meaning the Temple at Jerusalem. This initial flight over the Arabian desert is known as *al-Isra'*, "the Journey". Islamic tradition adds that he was accompanied by a host of angels who ministered to him and, when he arrived at Jerusalem, he dismounted and prayed with pious Jews and Christian monks. An account of his journey follows:

I was brought al-Buraq who is an animal white and long, larger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, who would place his hoof at a distance equal to the range of vision. I mounted it and came to the Temple (Bait-ul Maqdis in Jerusalem) then tethered it to the ring used by the prophets. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.101)

While he was there it is said that three angels visited him, offering him bowls of wine, honey and milk. Some traditions, such as the following one, say there were only two and what then happened is described in this narrative of the event:

Allah's Apostle was presented with two cups, one containing wine and the other milk on the night of his night journey at Jerusalem. He looked at it and took the milk. Gabriel said, "Thanks to Allah Who guided you to the Fitra (i.e. Islam); if you had taken the wine, your followers would have gone astray". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.196)

After this the journey into the heavens, *al-Mi'raj*, followed. It is widely reported in the Hadith literature but obtains no mention in the Qur'an. Muhammad first visited the sea of *kawthar*, the sea of "abundance". The word occurs only once in the Qur'an in *Surah 108:1*. He then went on to different levels in Paradise and met the former prophets such as Abraham, David, Joseph and the rest who conversed with him. Then the Angel Gabriel took him to a lote-tree on the border of the many heavens in Paradise before the throne of Allah.

Then I was made to ascend to Sidrat-ul-Muntaha (i.e. the lote- tree of the utmost boundry). Behold! Its fruits were like the jars of Hajr (i.e. a place near Medina) and its leaves were as big as the ears of elephants. Gabriel said, "This is the lote-tree of the utmost boundry". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.147)

The inclusion of the sighting of this celestial tree probably derives from the mention of Muhammad's vision of the great Angel *'inda-sidrah*, "near the lote-tree" (*Surah 53:13-14*). Neither Gabriel nor Buraq could go beyond this point but the Prophet was summoned into the presence of Allah himself after passing through a stage of glorious light. Here he was commanded to tell the Muslims that they were to pray fifty times daily:

Then Allah enjoined fifty prayers on my followers. When I returned with this order of Allah, I passed by Moses who asked me, "What has Allah enjoined on your followers?" I replied, "He has enjoined fifty prayers on them".

Moses said "Go back to your Lord (and appeal for reduction) for your followers will not be able to bear it". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.1, p.213)

Allah, on his petition, reduced the number of prayers to forty but again Moses replied that his people would not be able to bear it. So it went on until it was no more than five. Yet again Moses protested that this would be too much for them to bear but Muhammad then stopped.

I replied that I had been back to my Lord and asked him to reduce the number till I was ashamed, and I would not do it again. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.187)

Allah then responded that whoever kept the five times a day prayer would receive the credit and reward of fifty prayers. After the Prophet had seen some of the fairest delights of Paradise and met some of its most noble women he visited the compartments of hell where demons guarded and tormented the damned before he returned home.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE STORY OF THE NOCTURNAL ASCENT

Today the whole event is symbolised by the magnificent Dome of the Rock, *al-Qubbat-as-Sakhra*, which stands above the rock in Jerusalem from which Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. It stands on the site of the original Jewish Temple and just alongside it is the equally famous *Masjid al-Aqsa*, a large mosque named after the description given of the original structure on the site in Surah 17:1. While most Muslims and the early traditions say that Muhammad's ascent to heaven was in his physical body in an actual journey there are numerous Muslim writers and scholars who believe it was only a mystical experience, a striking dream which he had that night. In one of the earliest records of his life we read this report:

One of Abu Bakr's family told me that Aisha, the Prophet's wife, used to say: "The apostle's body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.183)

The whole story appears to be founded on legendary material rather than an actual event for a number of reasons. It is probable that Muhammad simply had a strange dream one evening which has been embellished into the account we have in the Hadith literature today. To begin with it is said in these records that after Muhammad began to declare his experience in Mecca he was challenged by the Quraysh to describe the Temple he had seen in Jerusalem. He answered:

I stood at al-Hijr, visualised Bayt al-Muqaddas and described its signs. Some of them said: How many doors are there in that mosque? I had not counted them so I began to look at it and counted them one by one and gave them information concerning them. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.1, p.248)

He is said to have forgotten how the Temple (called in Islam *Baitul-Muqaddas*, the "Holy House") appeared but a vision was given to him immediately of its precincts and he was able to describe it to them. A similar tradition of this incident reads:

Allah lifted me before Bait-ul-Maqdis and I began to narrate to them (the Quraish of Mecca) its signs while I was in fact looking at it. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.109)

These traditions contain a patent anachronism. The great Temple that had stood on the site had been destroyed by the Roman army under Titus some five hundred years earlier. Later Roman governors refused to allow it to be rebuilt and, after the conversion of Rome to the Christian faith at the time of the Emperor Constantine, the Christian leaders of the city, then known as *Aelia Capitalonia*, used the site purely as a rubbish dump which was how Umar found it when he conquered the city some years after Muhammad's death. It has to be asked how Muhammad could have seen and described in such detail a building that had been burnt down so many centuries earlier.

Secondly the story of Muhammad's nocturnal ascent has obvious parallels in other religious legends and writings dating from some centuries before Islam. There are records in the Jewish Haggadah that are similar to the Miraj and narratives in the dreams of the Midrash are also analogous to it. Nonetheless it is from Zoroastrian works that the closest parallels can be drawn. In an old Pahlavi book known as *The Book of Arta Viraf* there is a story of a saintly priest from whom the book gets its name, Arta Viraf, who went into a trance one night. His spirit immediately went up to the heavens under the guidance of an archangel named Sarosh and it passed from one

utopia to the next until it finally reached the presence of Ormazd, the great deity of the whole universe. When Arta Viraf had seen everything that was in the heavens and the happy state of their many inhabitants Ormazd commanded him to return to earth as his messenger and he commanded him to tell the Zoroastrians all that he had seen and heard. The parallels between this story and the Mi'raj are so obvious that it must be presumed that the latter event is an adaptation of the earlier one and that it has simply been given an Islamic content.

The Zoroastrians also taught, long before Islam, that there is a marvellous tree in Paradise called *humaya* in Pahlavi which corresponds very closely to the *sidrah*, the lote-tree of Islam. The coincidences are too many and so prominent that it can hardly be doubted that Islam is indebted to Zoroastrianism for its Mi'raj narrative.

In a similar Zoroastrian work, the Zerdashtnama, there is also an account of how Zoroaster himself ascended into the heavens before he obtained permission to visit hell where he found *Ahriman*, the devil. As these works predate Islam by some centuries it must be presumed that the Mi'raj, as so graphically described in the Hadith, is really only an adaptation of similar fanciful stories found in other religious legends.

4. THE MESSENGER TO ALL THE WORLDS

ALLAH'S PROPHET TO THE ARABS

When Muhammad began his mission he saw himself as no more than a warner to his people (*Surah 74:2*). His initial reaction to the call he received was in fact to conceal his experience and it took some time before he began to preach publicly and even then he believed his charge was primarily to turn his nearest kinsmen to the path of Allah.

Three years elapsed from the time that the apostle concealed his state until God commanded him to publish his religion, according to the information which has reached me. Then God said, 'Proclaim what you have been ordered and turn aside from the polytheists'. And again, 'Warn thy family, thy nearest relations, and lower thy wing to the followers who follow thee'. And 'Say, I am the one who warns plainly'. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.117)

It appears that he had no ideas of grandeur in those early days. He faced considerable opposition as he simply called the pagan Arabs away from the adoration of idols to the worship of the one true God. He severely warned them that a calamity could befall Mecca if they did not repent and acknowledge his message and it seems he saw himself in the role of a prophetic herald sent to rescue his people from the pending wrath of God. There was no awareness at this stage that he might have been called to be a universal messenger to reach all the nations with God's final message for mankind.

His humility likewise restrained him from claiming to be a miracle-worker or to have divine characteristics and he plainly told them "I am but a man like yourselves – it is an inspiration that has come to me that your God is only one God" (*Surah 18:110*). As time went on, however, he saw his category as that of a messenger to his own peoples like most of the messengers who had gone before him. He believed that it was Allah's purpose to send an apostle to every people (*Surahs 10:47, 16:36*) and that he was simply an Arab prophet sent to the Arab people. Thus his scripture, *al-Qur'an*, was not in the Hebrew or Greek language like the scriptures sent before him such as the *Tawraat* given to Moses and the *Injil* given to Jesus. It was in plain simple Arabic so that Allah's message to the Arabs could be plainly understood by them.

We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an in order that you might understand it. *Surah 12:2*

In fact he saw it as a considerable kindness to his own people that a messenger should have been sent to them from their own ranks. "Allah did confer a great favour on the believers when he sent among them a messenger from among themselves" (*Surah 3:171*). In time he saw this as the supreme purpose of his vocation – to lead them into the knowledge of the basic truths about God just as the people with a scripture before his time had been led. Muhammad's initial understanding of his purpose is summed up very succinctly in this verse:

It is He Who has sent amongst the Unlettered an apostle from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them, and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom, for they had previously been in obvious error. *Surah 62:2*

He began to distinguish between the alien Jews and Christians as the "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*) and his own Arab kinsmen as "the Unlettered" people (*al-Ummiyyun*) to whom he had expressly been sent (*Surah 3:20*) so that they too might become a People of the Scripture. It is not known when his perspective on his own calling dramatically rose to that of Allah's final, universal Prophet to all nations but there are signs in the Qur'an that he came in time to regard himself as a unique prophet – an Unlettered Prophet who had never been instructed in any previous Scripture (*an-nabbiyal-ummi*) whose coming had nonetheless been foretold in the previous revealed Scriptures:

Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures), in the Law (*at-Tawraat*) and the Gospel (*al-Injil*). *Surah 4:157*

Once he had moved to the city of Medina and had begun to reach and conquer other peoples his vision expanded until he regarded himself as the greatest of all prophets, sent to reveal God's final religion and to perfect it, and to call all the nations to submit to it.

THE UNIVERSAL MESSENGER TO ALL MANKIND

It is significant that in the very next verse following that in which the Qur'an addresses him as a unique prophet foretold in the former revelations he is spoken of as a guidance to all mankind. "Say, 'O Mankind! I am sent unto you all as the Apostle of Allah, to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He; it is He who gives both life and death. So believe in Allah and His Apostle, the Unlettered Prophet'" (*Surah 7:158*). From this time on Muhammad spoke of himself in terms that set him apart as the final universal messenger to all the nations of the world. He is recorded as saying:

There has never been a Prophet amongst the prophets who was not bestowed with a sign amongst the signs which were bestowed (on the earlier prophets). Human beings believed in it and verily I have been conferred upon revelation (the Holy Qur'an) which Allah revealed to me. I hope that I will have the greatest following on the Day of Resurrection. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.90)

Amongst the apostles I will have the largest following on the Day of Resurrection, and I will be the first to knock at the door of Paradise. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.133)

The image of Muhammad developed from that of being purely a prophetic warner to his own people to one of messianic proportions. The Qur'an describes him as a "universal" messenger to mankind (*Surah 34:28*) bringing them glad tidings and serious admonitions, and it not only commands the believers to send their blessings upon him but even states that Allah himself and all his angels do so:

Allah and His Angels send blessings on the Prophet: O you who believe! Also send blessings on him and salute him with all respect. *Surah 33:56*

He is elsewhere addressed with the illustrious title *rahmatatalil-alamin* meaning that he is a "messenger to the worlds" (*Surah 21:107*) and in yet another place he is called *khataman-nabiyyin*, the "seal of the prophets" (*Surah 33:40*). No prophet was to follow him as he was the greatest of all the apostles of Allah with his final revelation for all mankind. Obedience to Him became synonymous with obedience to his Apostle (*Surah 64:12*) and by the end of his life his vocation had come full circle.

From being a prophet only to his own as yet unscriptured peoples, he had become *the* Prophet whose Qur'an and religion, *al-Islam*, had now superseded all that went before them. Judaism and Christianity, respected initially as the recipients of truth in contrast to the ignorance of the pagan Arabs, had now become of no further relevance to Allah's purposes and Islam alone was the true religion (*Surah 3:19*) with virtually no scope for anyone who should henceforth choose any other path.

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him and in the Hereafter he will be among the lost. *Surah 3:85*

For this reason Islam, as it developed, never came alongside its predecessors such as Judaism and Christianity as a special religion of the Arabs or as simply an alternative faith of equal standing with them. It had become the full and final revelation replacing and superseding everything that had gone before it and nothing would surpass it. Muhammad's vision of himself as the final seal in Allah's plan for the ages finds expression very clearly in

these words attributed to him:

The similitude of mine and that of the Apostles before me is that of a person who built a house quite imposing and beautiful and he made it complete but for one brick in one of its corners. People would go round it, appreciating the building, but saying: Why has the brick not been fixed here? He said: I am that brick and I am the last of the Apostles. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1235)

A study of the whole subject of the revelation in Islam and the prophetic character of Muhammad reveals a unique personality whose vision and perspectives grew as time went on, yet allowing always for a clear consistency in this process of development. It all began with one word, *Iqra'*, and from that command a revelation of a scripture grew into the book today known as the Qur'an and a man grew in stature as a down-to-earth, practical prophet who nevertheless believed that he had a direct contact with the Supreme Being of all creation in heaven who eventually set him apart as his final messenger to all mankind. Christians might well challenge the credibility of his call to be a true prophet but without an understanding of the remarkable course of his apostolic experience it is impossible to understand the whole spirit of Islam or appreciate why it has such a tremendous hold on its adherents.

Chapter Five

The Legend: Muhammad in Popular Islam

1. THE NAMES OF THE PROPHET

THE VENERATION OF MUHAMMAD IN ISLAM

The historical Muhammad was an Arab among Arabs, an ordinary man who believed that Allah's final revelation, the Qur'an, had been sent down to him as nothing more than a faithful communicator of its contents. He was persuaded that he had been called to be a prophet, indeed the greatest of prophets, but he nevertheless was only a servant of Allah and throughout his twenty-three years of prophetic activity he never set himself forward as a divine sage or saintly mystic or anything else that might have suggested he was in any way superior to his companions.

The legend of Muhammad in the eyes of the masses of the Muslim peoples, however, is often far removed from the original. After his death simple stories about his life became embellished with folklore, projecting him as a great miracle-worker, as a sinless prophet who was a perfect model for all mankind, as a living person who could appear in dreams and bless pious Muslims, and as the first and foremost of all God's creatures whose light had been created before anything else. His image had been changed from that of a prophetic statesman and warrior to that of a saint and mystical philanthropist.

Throughout the world of Islam the name of Muhammad is revered as second only to the name of Allah himself. Festivals are held in his honour annually, invocations are offered to Allah on his behalf, poetry has concentrated on his excellent characteristics and music has been composed to his praise. To understand the deep spirit of devotion that Muslims show to their Prophet it is necessary not only to become acquainted with the historical personality but also the mythical image which prevails in the minds of the common Muslim peoples. A study of his heritage has to conclude, therefore, with the conception of the Prophet in Islam today.

According to Islam Allah has ninety-nine attributes commonly known in Islam as *al-asma al-husna*, "the beautiful names". Most of these are derived directly from the Qur'an (the first twelve follow in sequence in Surah 59:22-24) but some come from other sources. In time it became fashionable to define Muhammad as well with ninety-nine names, in this case the titles being known as *al-asma ash-sharifa*, "the noble names", which parallel the names of Allah. After reciting each name a faithful Muslim must recite the *tasliya*, "may the peace and blessings of God be upon him" (*sallallahu `alayhi wa sallam*). These names are regarded with awe and reverence

and are recited with keen religious esteem. A widely attested tradition quotes Muhammad himself as saying:

I have many names. I am Muhammad, I am Ahmad, I am al-Mahi through whom Allah obliterates unbelief, and I am Hashir (the gatherer) at whose feet people will be gathered, and I am Aqib (after whom there would be none), and Allah has named him as compassionate and merciful. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1255)

The name *Ahmad* has become a common alternative for the name of the Prophet in Islam and Jesus is said to have foretold his coming by this name (*Surah 61:6*). It derives from the same roots as the name Muhammad and means "one who is praiseworthy". A number of his many names are based on descriptions given to him in the Qur'an, for example he is called *al-Hadi*, "he who guides aright" (*Surah 13:7*); *al-Amin*, "the Trustworthy" (*Surah 26:107*); *al-Mubin*, "the Clear One" (*Surah 15:89*) and *al-Khatim*, "the Seal" (*Surah 33:40*). The other names have derived from the Hadith or have been attributed to him by Muslim sages who claim to have discovered them from one source or another.

A number of the divine names applied to Allah are also given to Muhammad. In Islam they share the following names: *al-`Aziz*, "the Noble"; *ar-Ra'uf*, "the Mild" and *ar-Rahim*, "the Merciful", both names being applied to the Prophet in *Surah 9:128*; *al-Wali*, "the Friend"; and *al-Haqq*, "the Truth" amongst others. A Muslim mystic was once moved to exclaim that the Prophet's beauty is the mirror of the Greatest Name of Allah, an indication of the extent to which reverence for the Prophet in Islam has come alongside the worship of Allah. In many modern printed Qur'ans the ninety-nine names of Allah are reproduced at the start of the book and the ninety-nine names of Muhammad appear in similar format at its end. These names are all displayed in their Arabic originals, usually in circles incorporating each respective title.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF THE NAMES OF THE PROPHET

Among Semitic nations a name has usually meant far more than it has in the histories of other peoples. Biblical names usually indicated something unique about the bearer and in Islam the names of the Prophet have also come to mean far more than they would simply as titles or appellations. The very recital of the name *Muhammad* is believed to bring a great *barakah* ("blessing") upon the reciter and his name accordingly obtains a great reverence in Islam. Mystical writings state that Adam named him by his own name after seeing his name inscribed in the heavens and interceded with Allah through it, that both the Angel Gabriel and the Prophet Abraham addressed him by that name in his *mi'raj*, and that the Angel of Death wept at the mention of his name when he came to call him to rest.

The great Muslim scholar of the ninth century of Islam, Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, made much of the root meaning "Praised", stating that he is both Muhammad and Ahmad, that his people are a people of praise (*hamd*) and that the prayer-rite of his people opens with praise. On the Day of Judgment Muhammad would carry the Banner of Praise and he would be raised to *al-Maqam al-Mahmud*, namely "the Station of Praise" (*Surah 17:79*).

It appears that the first title given to him in his own lifetime was *al-Amin*, "the Trustworthy" and that he was so known among his people even in his childhood "because of the good qualities which God had placed in him" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulullah*, p.81). This name accordingly became one of his foremost attributes and many Muslims carry the name *Amin* as a proper name or surname.

A number of the chapters of the Qur'an have a few Arabic letters preceding them. Their meaning is unknown but various interpretations have been given to them. The two letters *ha-mim* appear at the start of Surahs 40 to 46 and in time these came to be understood to be a short form of the devotion to the Prophet, *Habibi Muhammad*, "my Beloved Muhammad". These words are often found inscribed in decorative forms where special attention is given to their calligraphy. The similar letters *ta-ha* and *ya-sin* appearing at the start of Surahs 20 and 36 respectively have also been applied to Muhammad in Islamic history. *Ta-ha* is said to be an abbreviation of *tahir* meaning "pure" and *hadi* meaning "guiding". He has thus been called *Taha* in Islamic poetry, the Pure Guide, and is also very regularly called *Yasin* as a proper name.

It is the name *Muhammad*, however, which gains the greatest awe and reverence in Islamic piety. Because it is believed to contain a very considerable blessing (*barakah*), many children are given the Prophet's name or a similar derivative of it. Ja'far as-Sadiq, the sixth of the great Shi'ite Imams, is recorded as saying that everyone who bears the name of Muhammad shall, by that virtue alone, be entitled to enter Paradise. In the same way there is a tradition in Morocco that states that if in any house or tent there is a man with the name Muhammad,

angels will always be present to protect the home and its inmates unless a black dog or band of musicians drives them away.

In many poems it is said that the very mention of the Prophet's name will bring blessings on the reciter but some poets and mystics have cautioned against its familiar use, saying that very few are qualified even to pronounce his pure and holy name. One said in a poem that even though he might wash his mouth a thousand times with musk and rose water it would still be an absolute impudence to mention his name.

One of the commonest names of the Prophet, especially in the folk songs of the Muslim masses, is *al-Mustafa*, "the Chosen One". Also in common use is the name *al-Mujtaba*, "the Elected One", both names having become proper names for Muslim children.

During religious ceremonies and festivals numerous praises are sung to the honour of the Prophet and invariably his personal name and the other titles given to him are an essential part of the devotion. The deep reverence he obtains throughout the Muslim world may not be immediately apparent to a non-Muslim observer but it is essential to appreciate it if Muslims are to be sincerely understood.

2. THE BEAUTIFUL MODEL AND INTERCESSOR

MUHAMMAD THE BEAUTIFUL PATTERN AND EXAMPLE

Not only is the name of Muhammad revered throughout the Muslim world but his very personality is regarded as a perfect archetype of human conduct and behaviour. For centuries faithful Muslims have sought to emulate the *sunnah* of the Prophet, namely his way of life and example. A text of the Qur'an is taken as the basis of this express purpose to follow him in every aspect of his character and life:

You have indeed in the Apostle of Allah a beautiful pattern for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Last Day and who engages much in the praise of Allah. *Surah 33:21*

The verse addresses the Prophet as *uswatun hasanatur*, "a beautiful example", and anyone who does not follow his pattern is regarded as not truly belonging to him. In the early centuries of Islam numerous attempts were made to discover the historical Muhammad from the surfeit of myths and traditions that had been handed down through the years and gradually an agreement was reached as to his life and behaviour. This covered many aspects of his conduct, in particular his actions (*fi'l*), his words (*qaul*) and his tacit approval of certain deeds (*taqrir*). Each of these was considered to have a binding authority over the lives of true Muslims and his *sunnah* was regarded as second only to the Qur'an in importance.

This led to a deep veneration of the Prophet in popular Islam and he often appears as a kind of paternal figure who had perfect wisdom and whose guidance could be depended on without reserve. It was believed that the key to all happiness was to follow his example and to imitate him in every aspect of his being, even down to fine points like using an olive twig (*miswaak*) to clean the teeth just as he had done. All his comings and goings were regarded as of the utmost importance for correct living and much research was done to rediscover his movements and manner of rest, his eating and sleeping (to the point of determining which side he slept on), his speech and walk, and his manners and courtesies. The observance of the basic regulations of Islam became supplemented with a moment-by-moment repetition in daily life of his customs and ways.

For this reason it is common to meet many thousands of Muslims anywhere in the Muslim world who go to great lengths not only to imitate their prophet in wearing a beard and sandals but even to scrupulously ensure that their beards maintain the length his was recorded to have been. Many relics have been carefully preserved of his footprints, beard, shawls, head-coverings and cloaks, irrespective of whether these are really authentic or not.

The emphasis on his example falls on his physical appearance as well as his spiritual character. It was said that his bodily appearance had a fragrance and mystery about it and that women even took his sweat and perspiration to use as a perfume. He was so pure that not even flies would dare to sit on him and he was so luminous that he did not even cast a shadow. Such legends prevail all over the Muslim world. Even a physical defect such as a mole or protuberance was transformed into a thing of unique beauty, in his case as a proof and seal of his prophethood. A typical tradition on his appearance reads:

Al-Bara' reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) had the most handsome face amongst men and he had the best disposition and he was neither very tall nor short-statured. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1249)

The abhorrence of idols and images had led Muhammad to express revulsion at the art of human representation and Muslim artists have not easily represented their prophet in their works, usually showing him without his face being portrayed. Nonetheless they found another way to set the example of his being before them in the form of the popular *hilya*, a small poster which carries Arabic inscriptions of his name and details of his personal qualities. It is believed that in beholding a *hilya* a Muslim beholds the face of the Prophet himself and that the viewer who longs for a sight of its object will be satisfied and will never see the flames of hell. In Muslim homes, especially in Turkey, these posters are kept as forms of protection and sources of blessing.

Islamic tradition knows no limits in projecting him as a perfect example for all mankind. His spiritual qualities are regarded as the finest ever known in human history. It might surprise Western readers to learn that the two characteristics most frequently mentioned are his kindness and humility. He is said to have generally maintained a friendly but serious attitude and, though he laughed rarely, did so very loudly and heartily. He had a heart for the weak and is not recorded as ever striking his servants or his wives. He was, for all his religious intensity, a most pragmatic man. On one occasion, when a Bedouin asked him if he should not just let his camel roam loose as a sign of his trust in Allah's provision, he replied that he should first tether it – and then trust in God! He was also constantly said to be very modest in his behaviour and disinclined to reject anyone who came to him seeking help or personal advice. Modesty was also claimed as one of his prime virtues and it was said that his dislike for anything could be seen immediately in the expression on his face. A tradition testifying to his modesty reads:

Masruq reported: We went to `Abdullah b. `Amr at the time when Mu`awiya came to Kufa, and he made a mention of the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) and said: He was never immoderate in his talk and he never reviled others. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1244)

Yet to myriads of Muslims there is something far more important than emulating his behaviour as a means of gaining favour with Allah and that is the hope of the Prophet's intercession on the Day of Judgment when the sins and secrets in the hearts of all men will be revealed and judged accordingly.

SHAFAT: THE INTERCESSION OF THE PROPHET

The Qur'an in principle denies that there is any intercession with Allah save that which he alone gives: "You have no one besides Him to protect or intercede: Will you not then receive admonition?" (*Surah 32:4*). It was the conviction of the pagan Quraysh that their idols would intercede for them that made Muhammad speak so emphatically against this concept (*Surah 10:3*). Nonetheless there are a few passages such as this one which seem to indicate that Allah can allow someone to intercede with him in certain circumstances:

His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there that can intercede in His presence unless He allows it? *Surah 2:255*

It was the exception at the end of this verse that opened up the belief that Muhammad himself could become an intercessor with Allah on behalf of his own community, his *ummah*. In another verse even more support was found for the view that Muhammad, and he alone, had the right to mediate with Allah:

And those whom they call on besides Allah have no power of intercession, except him who bears witness to the truth, as they are aware. *Surah 43:86*

To the Muslim commentators of the Qur'an it was quite obvious that it was Muhammad himself who alone could be the witness to the truth of whom this passage spoke and in consequence a doctrine of intercession became established in Islam. The Qur'anic word for this power is *shafa`at* and the Prophet accordingly, among his many titles, is also called *Shafi`*. It also seemed evident that this intercession could only be on behalf of his own people and traditional Islam has always taught that, although such intervention could be for the upright and reprobate alike, they would have to be Muslims for no other people could expect to be favoured by a prophet whom they had not acknowledged. His authority to intercede is well established in the tradition literature:

Abu Musa reported the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) as saying: Make intercession to me, you will be rewarded, for Allah decrees what He wishes by the tongue of His Prophet. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1421)

Anas b. Malik reported the Prophet (peace be upon him) as saying: My intercession will be for my people who have committed major sins. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1326)

A common theme in Islamic poetry is the sublime hope of a vision on the Day of Resurrection when the Prophet will appear with a green banner with which to cover his people and assure them of his intervention on their behalf with Allah. Going before them with this green banner of praise they can confidently enter the gates of Paradise knowing that they are fully protected by his presence.

Nonetheless there is another source of intercession other than the Prophet's direct appeal that Muslims believe will avail them. It is a small amulet or charm known as the "Seal of Prophethood" which contains praise to God in various ways including salutations such as *Ya Allah* (O Allah!), *Ya Rahman* (O Compassionate!), *Ya Subhan* (O Praised One!) and *Ya Sultan* (O Ruler!). It is commonly believed that, if this amulet is placed in the shroud or grave of a deceased Muslim, he will never experience the pain of the grave and that Allah will forgive all his sins and fill his grave with light.

To ensure Muhammad's intercession it is essential that a faithful Muslim implore the blessings of Allah upon the Prophet. The Qur'an states that Allah and his angels send their blessings on him and Muslims will actually never mention his name without some salutation of peace and will, through many prescribed prayers, invoke their own request for the favour of Allah upon him. "Bless our master Muhammad and grant him mediation and merit and high rank and that praiseworthy station which you have promised him" is a typical prayer of this kind.

While the usual word for intercession is *shafa'at*, there is another word in the Qur'an which is used in a similar context, namely *wasila*. It appears only twice in the book (*Surahs 5:34, 17:57*) and its meaning is to gain access to Allah or to obtain a special favour with him. In Islamic tradition this word appears often as a comparable means of obtaining intercession with Allah. In this case it really appears to mean the right to a position of honour near the throne of Allah rather than a granting of pardon or a mystical union with him. The nearer a Muslim's position to Allah, the more likely it is that he will obtain a good recommendation.

In all this Muhammad becomes absolutely central to the hopes, desires, convictions and yearnings of the average Muslim. Over the many centuries of Islam his image has taken on messianic proportions and, while all Muslims will boldly state that they worship Allah alone and that their prophet was only a faithful messenger, it is obvious that his status in the world of Islam is such as to place him almost as an essential mediator between Allah and his people.

3. NUR-I-MUHAMMAD: THE LIGHT OF MUHAMMAD

THE PRE-CREATION MYSTERY OF MUHAMMAD

The legend of Muhammad in popular Islam has transformed him from being an ordinary man called out to be a prophet to the greatest of all God's creation whose essence was the first thing God ever generated and from which all angels, prophets, saints and mortals were formed. The myth is that he was first created as a glorious light and this spiritual existence before the creation of anything else is known popularly as the *Nur Muhammad*, the "Light of Muhammad".

The story differs slightly in the traditional writings of Islamic folklore but the general belief is that Allah first created light from the eternal darkness and that from this he created the *Nur Muhammad*. From this he created sweet water and set a blessing in it. Then he divided it into ten parts and from the first he created the Great Throne (*al-kursi*) of the heavens which he set above the waters. Then he created the Pen (*al-qalam*) and commanded it to circumambulate the throne for a thousand years. The Pen saw the name of Muhammad inscribed on the throne. From the other parts he set the rest of creation in motion. None of these other forms of creation came into being, however, before the Light of Muhammad had first praised Allah for seventy thousand years.

The transformation of Muhammad into a celestial being of primal importance in the order of creation appears to be an imitation of the *logos* of John's Gospel (*John 1:1-18*) and particularly of the Hebrew Kabbalistic concept of the *Adam kadmon* who is represented in the Kabbala as the first divine manifestation and the source of all other forms and ideas. Here too the things that existed before the creation of the world are split up into many

parts including the Throne of Glory, the Messiah, Paradise and Hell. The whole legend of the "Light of Muhammad" seems to be an adaptation of this theme in the interests of giving the simple prophet of Arabia an exalted status.

In some Islamic writings the myth is taken further and adapted to the nativity stories in the Christian Gospels. The Light of Muhammad was taken one Friday night in the days of the Arabian pilgrimage and placed in the womb of Amina, Muhammad's mother. The angels of heaven were glad and rejoiced while a wondrous light (like the Star of Bethlehem) passed through the heavens till it came to rest over her abode. When Abdul Muttalib, Muhammad's grandfather who had seen the light, knocked at her door he was greatly distressed because the Light of Muhammad had disappeared. He asked her what had become of it and she replied simply that she had just given birth to a son.

There is a passage in the Qur'an which might have given rise to the legends surrounding the Light of Muhammad for here he is said to have been sent by Allah as a shining lamp (*siraj-munir*):

O Prophet! Truly We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of glad tidings, a warner, as one who invites to Allah by His leave, and as a bright-shining lamp. *Surah 33:45-46*

Another Quranic text is interpreted to refer to the *Nur Muhammad*, namely the statement that Muhammad "saw him on another occasion" (*Surah 53:13*) which is interpreted to mean the vision which the Light of Muhammad had of the face of Allah prior to creation. The text, when read in context, however, clearly refers to a second vision of the celestial being which Muhammad saw on Mount Hira at the beginning of his mission. From early days in Islam Muhammad is spoken of as a luminous prophet and many statements in which he speaks of his sublime rank as the great Light are attributed to him. He is even addressed as the *nur al-anwar*, "the light of lights", and this is said to explain the other legend that his body did not cast a shadow.

An early Muslim commentator, Hallaj, was probably the first to speak of the twofold nature of the prophet and he explained it simply like this: As the *siraj nubuwwa*, the "lamp of prophethood", he was the eternal light from which all other things were created; but his status as the last *risala*, "the messenger", began with his appearance on earth as an ordinary human being. Parallels with Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ are quite obvious and it is probable that the Islamic legend is dependent on these beliefs to a large extent.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A VISION OF THE PROPHET

It is not surprising, after analysing the myths surrounding the *Nur Muhammad*, to find that one of the greatest of all blessings in popular Islam that a Muslim can hope to experience is a vision of the Prophet known as *ru'yatu an-nabi*. It can come in a number of ways to a faithful Muslim and it is one of the great longings of the Muslim masses. The vision of his beloved face might come *fi'l manam* – "in a dream" – in which the devotee sees an actual representation of the prophet before him, or he may appear as a Muslim awakes to normal consciousness after sleeping by which he becomes a testifier to it (*mushahada*), or it may simply be a vision of the heart, a continual gaze (*muraqaba*) not on the actual face of the Prophet but rather on his essential being.

In the early Hadith literature there are traditions speaking of seeing the face of Muhammad and these have been used as the basis for the hope of an actual manifestation. They are attributed to Abu Hurairah who recorded most of the traditions which have a mystical element. One reads:

Allah's messenger (may peace be upon him) is reported to have said: By Him in Whose Hand is the life of Muhammad, a day would come to you when you would not be able to see me, and the glimpse of my face would be dearer to one than one's own family, one's property and in fact everything. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1260)

There is believed to be great merit in longing to see the face of Muhammad and Muslim writings state that the best way of obtaining such a vision is by calling down blessings upon him. It is maintained that when a Muslim in prayer greets Muhammad with a salutation of peace, Allah returns his spirit to his body so that he may return the greeting. He hears the blessing of the company of his followers and knows them and, as the true devotee concentrates on his names and calls down blessings upon him unceasingly, the Prophet's graces are poured into his soul till a union of spirit with him ensues and he is then able to see him at all times whether awake or asleep. Another tradition attributed to Abu Hurairah reads:

I heard the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) say: He who sees me in a dream will see me when awake

(or, as if he will see me when awake), for the devil does not take my likeness. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1396)

A Muslim should actually pray that Allah will, in his mercy, grant him to see the face of the Prophet who ever beholds the face of Allah and he should even imagine him standing before him and that he is near for he is ever close to those who seek him and the imagination of his being is simply a prelude to an actual manifestation of his presence.

The great Egyptian scholar Jalaluddin as-Suyuti himself claimed to have had an actual vision of the Prophet. He said that it occurred one night while he was fulfilling the number of blessings to be called down upon him. Suddenly the Prophet came through the door and the whole room was filled with his light. He then beckoned to him to give him the mouth that had blessed him so often that he might kiss it. As-Suyuti's modesty would not let him kiss it so he turned aside and the Prophet kissed him on the cheek instead. He awoke trembling and so did his wife whereupon they discerned that their house was filled with the fragrance of his scent. His cheek too carried that fragrance and it did not depart from him for eight days.

In so many ways the Muhammad of popular Islam has become an exalted, mystical being far removed from the simple prophet of the Arabs. In many parts of the Muslim world it is the very name, thought and presence of the Prophet that dominates the hearts of the faithful. No Christian should be ignorant of his image in the hearts and lives of common Muslims and it is obvious that he should be respected and not be reviled in any way in conversation with Muslims.

Nonetheless it has to be conceded that the phenomenon of the great Light of the universe, as Muhammad has come to be regarded, is a great stumbling block to the Gospel and one which has somewhat confused the true image of Jesus who really was many of the things that have wishfully been attributed to the Prophet of Islam.

4. MAULID AN-NABI: HIS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

THE CELEBRATION OF THE MAULID FESTIVAL

One of the great popular festivals in the Muslim world is the *maulid an-nabi*, a celebration of the birth of Muhammad. Although the actual date of his birth is not known it has traditionally been fixed as the date of his death, the 12th day of the Islamic month *Rabi al-Awwal*. The festival is extremely popular throughout the Muslim world. It was introduced to Morocco in 1291 by the Merinid ruler in Fez and has been widely observed in the *Maghrib* (the Western region of North Africa) ever since. Many of the dynasties of this area claim direct descent from the Prophet and the attachment to his memory has become very strong.

The ceremony is also very popular in Egypt and has taken on a distinctly Indo-Islamic character in the Indian sub-continent. Here, where the celebration of a saint's death is observed through an *Urs* festival, the *maulid an-nabi* is commemorated in the same way. One of its typical characteristics is the illumination of a mosque or other appropriate venue with coloured lights and a festive atmosphere prevails. The proceedings commence with readings from the Qur'an, especially the recitation of the *Fatiha* (the opening chapter), and thereafter much time is given to the reading of mystical Islamic poetry in honour of the Prophet.

Great emphasis is placed on preparing special foods for communal consumption though in Turkey the day is spent in fasting until sunset. One of its characteristic features during the evening ceremonies is the singing of *ghazal* songs to venerate the Prophet and often the praise he receives is so profuse that the music almost borders on giving Muhammad equal status with Allah himself.

Throughout the Middle Ages the *maulid* was popularly celebrated even in Mecca itself but, after the conquest of the city by ultra-orthodox *Wahhabis* in the last century, the practice became forbidden. In other parts of India, however, it takes on a local character and the first twelve days of the month are devoted to ceremonies, processions, feasting and *qawwali* songs in honour of the Prophet. On the last day a great feast follows and food is distributed to the poor in the same manner as the commemoration of a festival day of any particular Muslim saint. In some parts of India relics of the Prophet are given special attention at this time. Any hair of the Prophet is put on public display and in many homes impressions in stone of his footprint are brought out. The plates on which these are kept are covered with brocades and the *qadam-i-mubarak* (the "blessed stone") is then carefully placed in a holder surrounded with fly-whisks usually made of peacock feathers. The house is illuminated,

ghazals are sung and music is played, incense is burnt, and the fly-whisks are waved over it. Five or six participants in the festival then follow a fourfold procedure of commemoration. A *marsiya* is recited to honour the birth of the Prophet to be followed by *durud* being his benediction, an account of *mu`jizat* being his miracles, and a *wafatnama* being a recollection of his death. The last is even recited in the local Hindustani so that all bystanders might share in the sorrow of his demise.

In 1912 the day of the Prophet's birthday, the 12th of *Rabi al-Awwal*, was declared a public holiday in the Ottoman Empire and it remains so in Pakistan to this day. In this country cities are decorated with lights, banners, flags and streamers while radio and television programs devote the day to the honour of Muhammad. In Egypt popular poetry honours him in fanciful legends about his birth. Birds and animals are said to have competed with one another to care for the Prophet after his birth and were disappointed when his wet-nurse Halima was given the precious task. Stars congratulated one another at his birth while emissaries are said to have come from afar to behold the phenomenon. Trees sprouted leaves immediately and gardens blossomed and even the sky is supposed to have attempted to touch the priceless earth from which he was made.

Even an orthodox scholar such as Ibn al-Jauzi writes in his book on the *maulid* that Gabriel and all the angels proclaimed his birth, that the Throne of heaven trembled, that the *houris*, the youthful maidens of Paradise, came out of their quarters to greet it while fragrance spread everywhere. Ridwan, the angel who keeps the gate of *Jannat al-Firdaus*, the "Garden of Paradise", called for the highest heavens to be adorned while flocks of birds were to go forth and each drop a pearl in Amina's apartment. When Muhammad was born she is said to have seen a great light which extended over the earth while the angels surrounded her and sung songs of praise to Allah.

These legends and many others have given great impetus to the celebration of Muhammad's birth and although attempts have been made to modernise the ceremony, these colourful and fanciful traditions have remained an integral part of the festival. The miracle of the Prophet's birth will continue to be venerated throughout the Muslim world and the love of his memory will also proceed to be implanted in the hearts of Muslim children from year to year. Like many other popular ceremonies its observance is one of the obligations of generations of Muslims and it will remain a part of the popular legend of the founder of Islam.

THE MAULID IN THE HISTORY OF ISLAM

Despite its popularity, however, the *maulid* is not universally approved. Orthodox Islam has steadfastly maintained that Muhammad, though the greatest of the prophets, was yet only a human being and a creation of Allah and therefore all such praise and honour should be given to Allah alone. The *maulid an-nabi* is considered to be a *bid`ah*, an "innovation" in Islam, and as such cannot be approved. To conservative Muslims the laws and practices of Islam were defined shortly after the death of Muhammad through an *ijma*, a "consensus" of orthodox Muslim theologians and jurists, and the duty of subsequent scholars was simply to maintain what had already been decided upon and determined about the Prophet and his religion. There was no room for such an innovation or heresy such as the *maulid*, especially when its popular character elevated Muhammad to a status contrary to his traditional prophetic model.

The origin of the ceremony is not certain but it is known that it became prominent in the twelfth century. According to Sunni historians the first celebration was arranged by Muzaffar ad-Din Kokburu, a brother-in-law of the famous Egyptian ruler Saladin. With the growth of Sufism in Egypt the *maulid* soon became widely popular and its spread to other Muslim countries followed.

The theologians of orthodox Islam, while respecting the intended reverence to the memory of the prophet, became alarmed at new practices contrary to the time-honoured traditions of Islam. Ibn Taimiyya, a very conservative Islamic jurist who died in the early fourteenth century, strongly condemned the introduction of new festivals, in particular the ceremony dedicated to birth of the Prophet. His contemporary Ibn al-Hajj was especially critical of the participation of women in the ceremonies and a sharp division between the *ulama* of Islam (the conservative theological leaders) and the festive-loving masses soon arose.

Just as the widely respected Islamic theologian al-Ghazzali had a few centuries earlier reconciled the mystical Sufi movement with orthodox Islam – an understanding which generally prevails to this day – so another great Islamic scholar was to find a point of reconciliation between the various factions on the *maulid* ceremony.

Jalaluddin as-Suyuti, an authority on almost all aspects of Islam, was at one time asked to address the thorny issue of the *maulid* and to give a decree, a *fatwa*, on it. He researched and considered it as objectively as he could and he came to decision which, even if it was not openly accepted by all parties, nonetheless obtained tacit approval and led to a general truce on the subject and a tolerance by the orthodox of the ceremony.

He acknowledged that it was an innovation without any form of precedent in the original texts or records of Islam but decreed that it was, nevertheless, a harmless practice that could well strengthen the Muslim masses in their love and esteem of Muhammad. He determined it to be a *bid`ah hasanah*, a "good innovation" for which one might well be rewarded because of the honour shown for the memory of the Prophet. No one could really object to a spontaneous expression of joy and happiness at his coming into the world and, as long as the festival consisted of a meeting of Muslims who gathered to recite portions of the Qur'an and the records of his wondrous birth followed by a banquet of celebration and nothing else, there could hardly be any disapproval of the observance.

He responded to the sentiments of the orthodox Muslims who stated that they could find no authority for the festival in either the Qur'an or in the *sunnah* of the prophet. He was particularly concerned to answer the scholar al-Fakihani who objected strongly to the music of men whom he considered to be mere idlers interested only in filling their stomachs, and women whose singing and swaying were simply gestures of lust and passion calculated to destroy the fear of the Day of Judgment. His response was that although a matter might not be found in the original sources, this did not mean it was not known. He found support in the traditions of al-Baihaqi who quotes a tradition from one of the companions of the Prophet, Anas, to the effect that Muhammad had on occasion performed the *aqiqah* sacrifice for his own birth. Nonetheless he expressed his disagreement with the excesses such as those so vehemently disapproved of by al-Fakihani.

The ceremony came to be generally accepted in time and despite recent attempts to reprobate it, it will remain a feature of popular Islam.

5. MIRACLES ATTRIBUTED TO MUHAMMAD

THE QUR'AN: MUHAMMAD'S ONLY MIRACLE

One of the great fictions of popular Islam is the belief that Muhammad performed a number of fantastic miracles, many of which are recorded in the Hadith literature. Nonetheless the Qur'an is quite explicit on the subject and, being the earliest source material of Islam, its teaching that he did not claim the power to work miracles has to be taken as proof that he did not. A typical text on the subject reads:

And the Unbelievers say: "Why has a sign not been sent down to him from his Lord?" But you are only a warner and to every people a guide. *Surah 13:7*

As the pagan idolaters had already rejected the signs (*ayat*) that had been performed by previous apostles it was hardly necessary that more signs should be shown to them. The Qur'an constantly reasons against the arguments of the unbelievers that Allah should send proofs of his guidance and thus accredit his prophetic messengers. It appears the Quraysh even retorted to Muhammad that they could not understand why, if Allah really wanted to communicate with them, he should call out an ordinary man like themselves whose credibility was hardly self-evident. In reply the Qur'an states that, if angels had been walking the earth, He would have indeed sent an angel to them – they rejected their human messenger not because his message was unconvincing but because of their own unbelief and ingratitude (*Surah 17:94-99*). In a similar passage they challenged Muhammad with numerous wonders they wished to see performed and his answer to them again was that he was only a messenger of Allah's truth and as a human being had no extraordinary miracle-working powers:

They say: "We shall not believe in you unless you cause a spring to gush for us from the earth, or have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst carrying abundant water, or cause the sky to fall in pieces, as you have declared against us, or bring Allah and his angels face-to-face before us, or have a house adorned with gold, or mount a ladder up to the skies. Even then we shall not believe unless you return with a book for us to read". Say: "Glory to my Lord! Am I anything more than a man, an apostle?" *Surah 17:90-*

Had Muhammad been a miracle-worker, indeed had all the fanciful legends of his miracles in his childhood in the tradition literature been true, it would have been a simple matter to respond to such challenges. Yet throughout the Qur'an, whenever the question of whether he could emulate the signs of the prophets before him arises, the answer is always in the form of a denial.

There is one tradition which supplements the teaching of the Qur'an and in this case the justification for his inability to work signs and wonders is simply that, whereas the former prophets needed such signs to prove their divine calling, the Qur'an itself in his case was such a unique phenomenon that no other evidence of his vocation needed to be given:

It is narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) observed: There has never been a Prophet amongst the prophets who was not bestowed with a sign amongst the signs which were bestowed (on the earlier prophets). Human beings believed in it and verily revelation has been conferred upon me (the Holy Qur'an) which Allah revealed to me. I hope that I will have the greatest following on the Day of Resurrection. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.90)

Despite all this plain teaching the tradition literature is replete with stories of great miracles performed by the Prophet and, as these are popularly believed in by great masses of Muslims throughout the world, it will be useful to record some of the more well-known incidents.

MIRACLES OF THE PROPHET IN ISLAMIC TRADITION

Some of these miracles are very legendary in character and many relate to the ability of nature and animals to communicate with him and acknowledge him as a true prophet of God. The folk poets of earlier centuries loved recounting the story of a gazelle which had been trapped by a very cruel hunter. As Muhammad passed by he found the antelope in tears because two of her offspring in the desert were dying of thirst. The plight of the hapless animal has been relayed in various works of poetry and in them Muhammad is found discoursing with it and, after hearing its woeful tale, releases it. When the hunter returns and confronts him about her escape, he states that the gazelle undertook to return and, as his own name was *Muhammad Amin*, the Faithful, if she did not he would be her substitute. Meanwhile the gazelle returns with her offspring and, after they have all bowed and kissed the Prophet's feet, the hunter being convinced of the miracle promptly embraces Islam. Similar stories are told of large snakes and other creatures conversing with Muhammad and poets and artists have dwelt liberally on the theme.

Muslims who seek to justify the records of his miracles allege that at least one is based on the Qur'an, namely an occasion where the pagan Quraysh in Mecca provoke him to prove his mission and, in response, he promptly splits the moon in half. The text used to support this incident from the Qur'an reads:

The hour has drawn nigh, the moon is split. Yet if they see a sign they turn away and they say "a continuous sorcery". *Surah 54:1-2*

This incident, following the words used in the Qur'an, has come to be known as *Shaqul-Qumar*, "the splitting of the moon". Many modern Muslim scholars teach that, when the text is read in the context of the passage which it introduces in the Qur'an, it is obvious that it is intended to be one of the signs of the imminence of the Day of Judgment. The "hour" referred to is clearly meant to be the Final Hour and, although the past tense is used in the verse, it is clear from other passages that the last times are spoken of historically as a definite way of declaring the irreversible nature of the future conclusion of all things.

Others have argued that, if such an amazing thing as the splitting of the moon had ever actually occurred, there should have been numerous reports of it. Likewise, when challenged as to his inability to perform signs, the Prophet should surely have produced this phenomenon as a sufficient proof. Nonetheless, although this interpretation can be traced to early times, the belief that it was an actual miracle goes back even further. A tradition from the Hadith literature reads:

Anas narrated that the people requested Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) to show them a miracle, and so he showed them the splitting of the moon. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.533)

The story basically states that when the Quraysh actually called upon Muhammad to split the moon in two parts, he enquired whether they would become believers if he did. They responded that they would. He then prayed to

Allah that the miracle might be performed and forthwith it was divided in two. He then commanded the bystanders to bear witness to the phenomenon, in particular as the two parts were so far apart that Mount Hira could be seen between them. They replied, however, that it was pure sorcery and, as no other people subsequently reported seeing it, it was obviously an optical illusion of his own divination.

Some of the miracles attributed to Muhammad appear to have been modelled on Biblical parallels in the lives of Jesus and the former prophets. The traditions have a story similar to the feeding of the five thousand by Jesus with five loaves and two fishes:

Once the journey food diminished and the people were reduced to poverty. They went to the Prophet (may peace be upon him) and asked his permission to slaughter their camels and he agreed. `Umar met them and they told him about it, and he said, "How would you survive after slaughtering your camels?" Then he went to the Prophet and said, "O Allah's Apostle! How would they survive after slaughtering their camels?" Allah's Apostle ordered `Umar, "Call upon the people to bring what has remained of their food". A leather sheet was spread and all the journey food was collected and heaped over it. Allah's Apostle stood up and invoked Allah to bless it, and then directed all the people to come with their utensils, and they started taking from it till all of them got what was sufficient for them. Allah's Apostle then said, "I testify that None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and I am his Apostle". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.3, p.401)

This tradition is typical of the spirit of popular Islam where the Prophet of Islam has been elevated beyond his historical role as nothing more than a messenger into that of a philanthropist, mystical saint, miracle-worker and perfect model for the whole Muslim world. In this case the plagiarism from an attested miracle in the life of Jesus is obvious and so is the attempt found in so many facets of his popular image to raise him from the level of an ordinary human being to messianic status.

Another popular tradition well-known throughout the Muslim world has Muhammad working a miracle to pass water through his fingers:

Narrated Anas bin Malik: I saw Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) when the `Asr prayer was due and the people searched for water to perform ablution but they could not find it. Later on (a pot full of) water for ablution was brought to Allah's Apostle. He put his hand in that pot and ordered the people to perform ablution from it. I saw the water springing out from underneath his fingers till all of them performed the ablution (it was one of the miracles of the Prophet). (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.1, p.118)

A story that has been a great favourite with poets and has been told over and over again through the centuries is that of the *hannana*, the sighing palm trunk. In the early days in Medina Muhammad used to lean on this trunk while preaching but later on a *mimbar*, a pulpit, was erected in its place. Having been made redundant the trunk sighed heavily as it longed for the touch of the Prophet's hand and, hearing of its grief, he duly brought it back into his presence to console it.

The Muslim masses, in their deep love for their Prophet, have without questioning recounted and accepted these folktales for centuries. It appears that any story that enhances his image will be freely accepted on this ground alone. The image of Muhammad in popular Islam today reflects more of the fantasies of generations of credulous devotees than the original that projects him as no more than an ordinary man singled out solely as the communicator of Allah's final message to mankind. The transformation from a prophet like all the others into a messianic figurehead is not immediately apparent in the face that Islam presents to the world but is one which the enquirer will soon discover once he probes the status of the Prophet in the hearts and minds of most of the ordinary Muslims of the world.

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The Qur'an: The Scripture of Islam

By **John Gilchrist**

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Preface

During the latter part of 1972 I was engaged in a lively discussion with a Jewish friend about religion, life and eternity. As a Christian by conviction I stood firm on what I believed to be the source of all truth, namely the Old and New Testaments. I still have that conviction. My friend, however, perhaps feeling that I had a very narrow perspective on the meaning of life, asked me "Have you ever read any of Emerson's writings?" I replied in the negative, not actually knowing who Emerson was. He then added "Have you ever read the Koran?" In all honesty I should have replied "What is that?" but, to avoid displaying too much ignorance and perhaps confirming his suspicions, I once again simply replied that I had not.

Within six months, after becoming involved in Muslim Evangelism, I purchased a copy of Sale's *The Koran*, one of the most well-known English translations of the original Arabic text. I read it through from cover to cover, making notes as I went along. Most of it made very little sense to me. Thomas Carlyle once said that only a sense of duty would carry an Englishman through the Koran and it was little more than that which kept me going. The sharp differences between Christianity and Islam which appear quite regularly in the book struck me forcefully, however, particularly its denials of the deity and crucifixion of Christ. It was not long before my sole purpose in reading it was to find fault with it and discredit it in favour of the Bible as the sole Word of God. Its haphazard arrangement, lack of chronological sequence and many cliches failed to awaken much interest otherwise in its contents.

In April 1976 I had the privilege of visiting the United Kingdom at the time of the World of Islam Festival, an extensive promotion of Islamic culture, arts and sciences in many of its cities. In the British Museum in London I discovered an exhibition of approximately one hundred of the finest manuscripts of the Qur'an which had been carefully assembled from Tunisia, Turkey, Iran and other Muslim countries. It was a display of calligraphy, religious devotion and historical treasures that will probably never be repeated. I could not avoid being impressed with the obvious care, devotion to detail, beauty and quality of the ancient manuscripts on display. My attitude soon changed and, while I believe to this day that the book invites critical analysis like any other, I also came to respect it very highly as a work honoured and revered as holy scripture by the Muslims of the world.

That respect has grown the more I have got to know it. Fourteen years ago I learnt how to read Arabic for the first time and since then have obtained a very limited knowledge of the Arabic language. It has been enough, however, to make the Qur'an come alive to me. Its sharp clichés, rhythmic style and deliberate choice of words have helped me to understand why it captivates those who believe it to be the final Word of God to mankind. It might be unkind to say, as many do, that there is no really good English version available as the original Arabic text does to some extent defy translation. Muslims are right when they say it cannot really be reproduced in another language.

I believe the Qur'an is a very unique book. In any age it would be so but particularly when it is remembered that it was compiled in seventh-century Arabia. In time I have come to appreciate not only its remarkable consistency but also the heartbeat of its spirit which pervades every page. In the third chapter of this book I have endeavoured to focus on its major themes and have found these a most interesting study-source. I also possess a fine handwritten Qur'an manuscript fully illuminated and copied out almost to perfection. It is one of the prized books in my library.

Nonetheless I cannot subscribe to the Muslim conviction that this book is the Word of God. The Bible overshadows it, both in its historical perspective on God's dealings with mankind and in the quality of its revelation of the divine character. In the first three chapters of this book, however, I have sought to let the Qur'an speak for itself. My aim is to transfer as far as possible to Christian readers a sense of the uniqueness that I have acquired over years of study of its form and contents.

The book's claim to divine origin, in my view, is really disproved by the numerous passages that have parallels in apocryphal and legendary works written some centuries before it. These are analysed in the fourth chapter. The aim is not to give Christians useful ammunition to attack the integrity of the book but rather to furnish definite evidences which serve to place its sanctity in serious doubt. Muslim scholars have always been well aware of these evidences but on the whole have chosen conveniently to ignore them. I am not aware of any real attempt by a Muslim writer to face them objectively and provide an explanation for their implications.

The last chapter analyses the history of the text of the Qur'an, in particular the manner in which it became standardised into a single text over many centuries. The evidences here challenge another cherished Muslim hypothesis, namely the theory that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved to its last dot and letter. It is my opinion that this conviction has been fashioned in bold defiance of the facts. Their theory is used as an argument that the Qur'an must be the Word of God, having been so miraculously safeguarded from textual corruption. I find this reasoning even harder to comprehend as it would appear to me that a book's proposed divine origin would be proved primarily by its contents. If it never was the Word of God in the first place, no amount of careful preservation would make it the Word of God.

This last chapter is largely a precis of my book *Jam` al-Qur'an: The Codification of the Qur'an Text* referred to more fully in the Bibliography. In addition to the Qur'an and Hadith works quoted throughout extracts have also been taken from two classical works on the collection of the Qur'an, namely As-Suyuti's *Al Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an* ("A Study in the Sciences of the Qur'an") and Ibn Abi Dawud's *Kitab al-Masahif* ("Book of the Manuscripts"). The latter work, which dates to the third century of Islam, has only been reprinted in Arabic, the text appearing in full in Jeffery's *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*. As-Suyuti was a great Islamic scholar of the ninth century after Muhammad.

The transliteration of Arabic words has been done as phonetically as possible, indicating the actual utterance of each word or clause in classical Arabic speech.

This book has been written primarily for Christians with little or no knowledge of the Qur'an. Those seeking to really get to know the book are recommended to obtain some learning of the Arabic language – the character of the Muslim scripture and its most prominent themes will then become far more meaningful. It is my opinion that Christians who wish to effectively witness to Muslims will need a sound knowledge of the Qur'an and I trust this book will contribute in some measure towards this end. Muslims appreciate Christians who have made an effort to seriously study Islam and who speak from knowledge rather than ignorance. I trust that Muslim readers will obtain some benefit from it as well. I do not hesitate to add that I hope they will consider the evidences set forth in the last two chapters objectively. They are derived from factual sources dating back to Pre-Islamic times and the very earliest days of Islam.

Chapter One

The Composition and Character of the Qur'an

1. MUSLIM REVERENCE FOR THE QUR'AN

THE DIVINE EXCELLENCE OF THE ISLAMIC SCRIPTURE

The Qur'an is the holy scripture of the Muslim peoples of the world. It is, in their eyes, the divine authentication of the faith they boldly profess. Although Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, is revered as the greatest of all Allah's servants, he is regarded as only a human messenger who lived and died like any mortal. The cities of Mecca and Medina are likewise regarded as possessing a special sanctity but, as with all other tangible things in the Islamic world, they are nothing more than material parts of the created order. The Qur'an, however, came from above and is the *kalam* of Allah, the divine word or speech expressing a *sifa*, an actual quality of his own personality and being. Even though the text of the Qur'an in book form may well have been compiled from earthly materials, the actual text represented is nonetheless no less than a visual record of a divine communication sent down from heaven itself.

During the early centuries of Islam a debate arose in the Muslim world as to whether the Qur'an itself, though the speech of Allah, was nevertheless created at a point in time. A group of free-thinkers had arisen who became known as the *Mu'tazila* with their principal base in Baghdad, the city where the Abbasid rule over the Muslim world had been established. They did not doubt that the Qur'an was Allah's speech but, believing that the human intellect was the ultimate source of all knowledge, they taught that the Qur'an was only a part of the created order which, having been brought into existence at an undetermined time, therefore had a beginning and could not be said to be divine itself. The orthodox Muslims, however, argued strongly in opposition to this view. They declared that, being the Word of Allah, it could not be separated from him and must have co-existed with him, uncreated, through all eternity. It had, from this divine source, simply been sent down and revealed to Muhammad at the most appropriate point in human history. Their view prevailed and ever since the Qur'an has been held to be uncreated. The Qur'an itself teaches that its written form on earth is merely a reflection of an exact original inscribed in heaven:

Assuredly this is a Majestic Qur'an (inscribed) in a Preserved Tablet. *Surah 85:21-22*

Most English translations of the Qur'an carry the title "The Holy Qur'an" and Christians may be inclined to think that it is the Muslim equivalent of the Holy Bible. To the extent that each book respectively is believed to be a form of divinely inspired Scripture and is the written source of all knowledge about God's revealed truth, the books are very similar. There is a fundamental difference, however, which has to be fully recognised if Muslim

reverence for the Qur'an is to be understood. The Bible is a record of the writings of numerous prophets of God and the apostles of Christ (in the Old and New Testaments respectively) who wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit of God and is therefore the preserved Word of God for mankind. God himself often speaks directly through these writings and his messages are recorded in numerous books, yet the form of each always takes that of a human author writing under the inerrant guidance of the Holy Spirit. God's actual words are included as quotations of prior direct communications to the relevant hearers.

Allah himself, however, is believed to be the actual author of the Qur'an. Here, too, one finds numerous passages where men, angels, prophets and even Satan himself speak, yet this time it is their words which are the quotations. Allah is always the speaker and what was recorded by Muhammad at any time as the Qur'an came to him was nothing less than a revelation from Allah himself. Over a period of twenty-three years it came to him through the medium of the angel *Jibril*, said to be the angel Gabriel (*Surah 2:97*), after having been sent down to the first heaven during the month of Ramadan. Allah speaks directly to the Prophet in the Qur'an in these words:

And in Truth We have sent it down, and in Truth it has descended, and We have sent you to be nothing more than a Proclaimer and Warner. And it is a Qur'an which We have (sent) piecemeal so that you may recite it to men in stages, and We have sent it down accordingly. *Surah 17:105-106*

The Qur'an itself often appeals to its own uniqueness, stating that it contains a "beautiful message" (*Surah 39:23*) and that no falsehood can come near it (*Surah 41:42*). It further states that it has been sent down in "pure Arabic" (*Surah 16:103*) and challenges its detractors to attempt to produce the like of it:

And if you are in doubt about what We have sent down upon Our servant then produce a *surah* like it, and call your witnesses besides Allah if you are truthful. *Surah 2:23*

A "surah" is a passage of writing and each chapter of the Qur'an is thus called. The book literally commands reverence and the utmost respect from its adherents and Muslims accordingly are very devoted to it. They are told to seek Allah's protection from the Evil One before reciting it (*Surah 16:98*) and, in words very similar to those set out in this text, they say *A`uuthuu billaahi minash-shaytaanir-rajiim* – "I seek refuge in Allah from Satan the stoned". They follow this by reading the *bismillah*, the heading of every chapter of the Qur'an excepting the ninth surah, which reads *Bismillaahir-Rahmaanir-Rahiim* – "In the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful". Only then is the Qur'an itself recited. It is furthermore essential that it be recited properly and Muslims go to great lengths to learn by heart passages to perfection.

To impress all the more upon Muslims that the book is Allah's own Word the Qur'an constantly commands them to bring him to remembrance as they recite it so that its reading may not become an end in itself. Unlike the Bible, which Christians generally read in their own languages to discover its message, the Muslim finds merit just in reciting the Qur'an in its original Arabic even if he does not fully understand what he is reading. It is in this recitation that the Muslim is required to fix his mind on Allah:

And when the Qur'an is recited, listen attentively and be silent so that you may find mercy. And bring the Remembrance of your Lord into your soul humbly and reverently, not loud of voice, in the morning and evening. And do not be among the heedless. *Surah 7:204-205*

They are also commanded to recite it slowly (*Surah 73:4*) so that a spirit of reverent awareness of Allah himself may always prevail. The "Remembrance" of Allah is known popularly in Islam as *al-Dhikr* and the Sufi Muslims of the world (the mystics of Islam) have special ceremonies for this express purpose. The Qur'an itself is called *al-Dhikr* on eight occasions (eg. *Surah 15:6, 15:9*) indicating its function as a summons to the recollection of Allah and his glory.

THE HISTORIC SANCTITY OF THE WRITTEN TEXT

During Muhammad's own lifetime portions of the Qur'an were committed to writing on various materials and not long after his death the whole book was codified into a single text. Over the centuries copies were transcribed

and in recent times the Qur'an has been printed and sold throughout the world. As can be expected written Qur'ans are very highly respected and old handwritten manuscripts are especially prized.

Most ancient manuscripts of the Qur'an were carefully written, not only to avoid mistakes, but to reproduce the text as impressively as possible. The early script known as *kufi* was soon adapted into a form of art and calligraphy and transcribers meticulously preserved the text by writing it out as perfectly as they could. If just a stroke or letter was not faultlessly reproduced they would scrap the page and start again.

In later centuries such manuscripts became decorated with colourful headings and the first chapter of the Qur'an, known as *Suratul-Fatihah* ("The Opening Chapter"), together with the first few verses of the next chapter was beautifully outlined in oriental style. Gold-leaf margins and outlines were mixed with dark blue backgrounds and other colourful styles and motifs (often floral) to give an appearance of grandeur to the text. Such a decoration became known as an *unwan* and virtually all the old handwritten texts have them. Other chapter headings were also decorated in colourful style with gold-leaf always a choice addition to give class to their appearance while floral and arabesque medallions alongside the text added to the charm of the manuscript.

The script changed as well after the first few centuries and the *naskhi* script became the most popular and most of the surviving copies of old Qur'an manuscripts employed it. The similar *thuluth* script was used at times and to this day a cursive script known as *maghribi* ("western") is still used in countries such as Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Virtually all printed Qur'ans employ the *naskhi* script. The oldest surviving passages of handwritten texts dating to the second century of Islam are inscribed in a slanted text known as *al-ma'il*. More will be said on this subject in the last section of this book.

As a result of the conviction that the Qur'an is the uncreated *kalam* of Allah, certain scruples surround handwritten or printed copies of its text. It is a belief of the strictly orthodox that the Qur'an should never be touched or opened by anyone other than a true Muslim and certain ablutions should be observed before this is done. The Qur'an itself says "None shall touch it but those who are clean" (*Surah 56:79*) and a tradition emphasises the need for a proper ablution:

`Abd Allah b. Abu Bakr b. Hazm reported: The book written by the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) for `Amr b. Hazm contained this also that no man should touch the Qur'an without ablution. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.94).

It is also customary to have a small ledge as close to the roof as possible upon which the Qur'an is to be placed when it is not being read as it should obtain the highest place in the home. Muslims will also not leave a Qur'an on a chair, seat or bed as this is believed to be common property where people have sat or lain and unsuitable for such a book. For the same reason a Qur'an should never be placed on the ground where people have walked. Special wooden Qur'an stands are provided in mosques upon which the book can be placed while the reader is sitting on the ground. The book should be kissed before it is opened and, once read, it should be closed as a tradition prevails among Muslims that Satan will come and read an open Qur'an if no one else is reading it.

In closing it should be added that the grammatical form of the Qur'an has become the standard by which all good Arabic grammar is tested. It is presumed beforehand that the text is unimpeachable and its style likewise has become the norm by which all other Arabic writings can be evaluated. Any deviation from its method is regarded as a defect. Even in the realm of literary criticism this principle holds sway. Many Western scholars of Arabic history have believed that some of the Arabic literature quoted in al-Baqillani's *I'jaz al-Qur'an* is of a far superior quality to the monotonous tone of the Qur'an, yet these works perforce have to be regarded as subordinate to it simply because the Qur'an is presumed to be the standard by which all other poetry and literature must be evaluated (and, accordingly, deemed inferior!). If anyone was to attempt to "produce a surah like it" he could be sure by these very principles of comparison that he would have no prospect of success.

2. THE OUTLINE, NATURE AND FORM OF THE BOOK

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE QUR'ANIC TEXT

The Qur'an is almost the length of the New Testament though its structure and form is very different to it. It is comprised of one hundred and fourteen surahs which are of unequal length and are not compiled in any sort of chronological order.

The longest surahs occur first and, as one progresses through the Qur'an, the chapters become shorter and shorter so that, whereas the second surah has two hundred and eighty-six verses, the last ten are made up of only a few lines each.

Each surah has a title usually taken from a significant word or name usually at the beginning of the text. Some introduce the major theme of the surah, for example the twelfth chapter which is known as *Suratu-Yusuf*, "Chapter of Joseph", because he is its central theme. It is interesting to discover that, although other Biblical prophets are mentioned throughout the Qur'an at various points, Joseph is not referred to anywhere else in the book. It appears that Muhammad only heard of him and the story of his life during his later years as this surah is one of the last said to have been revealed to him. Yet it is obvious from the following verse taken from its introduction that he was very moved by it:

We relate to you a most beautiful story, in that we reveal to you this (part of the) Qur'an, though before it you were among those ignorant of it. *Surah 12:3*

The nineteenth chapter is titled *Suratu-Maryam*, the "Chapter of Mary", because the mother of Jesus is its central theme. Nonetheless the Qur'an also has another well defined division, this time into thirty sections of virtually equal length, which Muslims also describe as "chapters" or portions but which are known by a different name. Each one is called a *Juz'* or, in the popular Persian terminology, a *Siparah* (from *si* – "thirty" – and *parah* – "portions"). There is no correlation between these and the surahs of the Qur'an and their identification in a written Qur'an is not so obvious. In some they are marked by a medallion alongside the text, in many printed Qur'ans by an accentuation or decoration of the first verse of each successive passage. The purpose of this division is to enable Muslims to recite the Qur'an each night during the thirty nights of the holy month of *Ramadan*, the month in which all Muslims are compelled to fast from sunrise to sunset.

At the beginning of twenty-nine of the surahs of the Qur'an, just after the *bismillah*, are certain Arabic letters not forming a word. No one knows what they mean and a number of interesting interpretations and suggestions have been made to unravel their purpose. Some learned Muslims have claimed that they have a profound meaning known only to Muhammad himself but nothing can be said of them with any certainty. At least six surahs begin with the letters *alif, lam, mim*.

Nonetheless to Muslims generally the meaning of these letters is not important as the recitation of the Qur'an is regarded as just as vital as applying its teachings. The very word *Al-Qur'an* means "The Recitation" and the practice is so seriously regarded by Muslims that they will go to great lengths just to learn its correct pronunciation, a pursuit now developed into a science and known as *`ilmul-tajwid*, the "knowledge of pronunciation". The actual recitation of the Qur'an is known as *tilawah* and it appears from the following tradition that even Muhammad was concerned to be scrupulous in this matter:

Gabriel used to recite the *Qur'an* before our Prophet, may Allah bless him, once every year in Ramadan. In the year in which he breathed his last he recited it twice before him. Muhammad said: I hope our style of reading conforms to the last recitation by Gabriel. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.243).

Each surah of the Qur'an is also broken up into brief sections known as *ruku'ah* as Muslims deem it commendable to make a bow in reverence, a *ruku'*, at the end of the recitation of each of these sections. They are designated in the Qur'an by the Arabic letter *`ain* in the margin and are accompanied by the section number and number of verses in each case. Often these designations are also embellished with floral rosettes or other forms of medallion.

The Qur'an has a number of names for itself. It is called *Qur'anul-Majid*, "a Glorious Qur'an" in Surah 85:21 and is elsewhere described as *Qur'anul-Karim*, "a Noble Qur'an" (Surah 56:77). In Surah 36:2 its title is *al-Qur'anul-Hakim*, "the Wise Qur'an" and many modern printed Qur'ans employ one or more of these names in the title-page of the book. One such Qur'an is titled *Qur'an Karim wa Furqan Adhim*, "a Noble Qur'an and an Exalted Criterion". The title *al-Furqan* itself is applied to the Qur'an in Surah 25:1 and it implies that the holy book is the "criterion" by which all truth can be distinguished from falsehood and all right from wrong.

UNIQUE FEATURES IN THE FORM AND STYLE OF THE BOOK

The Qur'an is very different to the Bible in that it was compiled through the mediation of only one man over a period of twenty-three years until the day of his death. It was only this event that sealed the length and content of the book. As long as Muhammad remained alive there was always a possibility that fresh material could be added.

The book itself, as stated already, has no chronological sequence. While it covers large parts of Biblical history and freely acknowledges the former prophets, it not only does not attempt to give any kind of historical sequence to the events it records but it also offers no locality or time in history when they occurred. The only place mentioned by name in the Qur'an is Mecca (*Bakkah* in the text of Surah 3:96) and no dating whatsoever of any event is recorded. Unless the reader of the Qur'an is familiar with these from another source – the Bible in particular – he has no hope of being able to compose a picture of prophetic history.

The story of Jonah is not dated in the Bible but the short narrative in the book of the same name leaves no doubt as to exactly what took place and where he went. The story is patchily reproduced in the Qur'an in Surah 37:139-148 and is lacking vital details. The cities of Tarshish and Nineveh are omitted and no mention is made of the storm which led to him being thrown overboard into the sea, though his condemnation by lots is recorded. The reader is, it appears, presumed to know the story in its basic details. On the positive side the Qur'an can be viewed as a Scripture intended for edification which need not concern itself with factual or chronological details long receded into history. It does not seem to be interested in the events it records from a historical perspective nor in localities or personalities as such. These are secondary and incidental to the real theme – the relevance of Allah's dealings and experiences with men in former times as examples for the present and the future. It engages with incidents and refers to them only to suit its own purposes.

Nonetheless there are times when the reader cannot help getting the impression that details may be lacking as a result of insufficient information being available to the book's author. The Qur'an records a story similar to Nathan's parable to David in 2 Samuel 12:1-6 but it states that the incident was a real one where two disputants actually came into his presence, the one complaining that the other had taken his only ewe when he already had ninety-nine of his own (*Surah 38:22-23*). When David angrily pronounced judgment against the second litigant, the text says he suddenly realised that he had personally been tried through it and fell down asking forgiveness. No indication is given as to what he had done wrong nor how the story related to his own offence. Surah 38:25 adds that Allah then forgave him for "this", not hinting as to what it was. Again, without recourse to the comprehensive narrative of the whole event in the Bible, the reader cannot hope to discover what the Qur'an is talking about.

A good example of the somewhat haphazard structure of the Qur'an is found in the passage which follows the story of Jonah in Surah 37. The next verses (*Surah 37:149-157*) contain an admonition about the pagan Arab belief that certain idols were the daughters of Allah. How could he only have daughters while they had sons (in the light of the Arab belief that sons were a blessing but daughters a misfortune)? The passage has no connection whatsoever with what went before it. Virtually the whole of the Qur'an is compiled in this way.

This last-mentioned passage, however, is symbolic of one of the unique features of the Qur'an. The book constantly employs argument and reasoning to convince its hearers of its message. As an appeal to the pagan Arabs not to persist in idolatry the Qur'an argues strongly from the evidences around them of an obvious single source of all creation (similar to Paul's reasoning in Romans 1:20):

Who has made the earth your couch, and the heavens your canopy; and sent down rain from heaven, and brought forth fruits for your provision? So do not knowingly set up rivals to Allah. *Surah 2:22*

Similar disputational reasoning is used in Surah 6:32 where it is argued that the amusements and frivolity of life of this world are obviously temporal and that a much wiser occupation would be the pursuit of a permanent home in the hereafter. Will they not then understand? Likewise, in a few verses further on, the pagans are asked who they would appeal to if Allah's wrath or the final Hour were suddenly to come upon them (*Surah 6:40*). Against the Christians the Qur'an charges "How can Allah have a son when he has no wife?" (*Surah 6:101*). It is ironic that Mary asks a similar question, not objectionably but by way of enquiry, in Surah 3:47 where she too asks how she could have a son when she had no husband? In the next verse the Qur'an declares that Allah can do as he wills and that he only has to speak the word *kun* ("Be!") and *fayakun* ("it comes to be"). Surah 19:21 adds that such things are easy for Allah. By the same reasoning the Qur'an should be able to answer its own question in Surah 6:101. Nonetheless these passages are typical of many where the spirit of argumentative reasoning is employed in the book.

In the earlier passages of the Qur'an which concentrate on sharp, prophetic pronouncements a catching rhythmical prose is used with poetic effect. This *saj'* style tends to fall away in the later passages which deal with practical issues at greater length but its use is one of the features of the Qur'an. (It is important to remember that the earliest portions of the Qur'an are generally found in the surahs at the end of the book while the later portions paradoxically appear at the beginning).

Although the Qur'an is said to be an eternal Scripture and that the Prophet of Islam was commissioned solely to communicate its contents without any involvement in its compilation, it interacts with him and addresses him personally on numerous occasions. He is commanded to "Say" (*qul*) that he is only a man like all others but that an inspiration has come upon him (*Surah 18:110*); he is bidden to invite people to his Lord's way with wisdom and beautiful preaching and to argue in gracious terms (*Surah 16:125*); he is to strive against unbelievers and hypocrites and to be firm with them (*Surah 66:9*) and is admonished for frowning and turning away from a blind man who might have profited from his teaching, especially as he came to him in earnest sincerity (*Surah 80:1-10*).

The Qur'an is in many ways a unique book in its outline, style and form. It can take time for a non-Muslim to become acquainted with these features but the exercise is essential if it is to be understood.

3. IMPORTANT SURAHS, CLICHES AND PASSAGES

THE OPENING CHAPTER AND OTHER MAJOR SURAHS

Some of the chapters and passages of the Qur'an are regarded as having a special sanctity and their recital is believed to be imperative and very meritorious. The most important of these is the *Suratul-Fatihah* which is unusual in its placing as the opening chapter of the book. It has only seven verses, unlike the other early surahs which are the longest in its text. It is set out as a prayer to be addressed to Allah:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds; the Compassionate, the Merciful, Master of the Day of Judgment. You alone we worship and from You alone we seek help. Lead us into the Straight Path; the path of those whom you have favoured, not those with whom you are angry, or go astray. *Surah 1:1-7*

This is one of the few passages in the Qur'an where Allah is not speaking directly but where the text is put into the mouth of Muslims who worship him. Every time Muslims pray or visit the mosque this prayer is offered up to Allah in its Arabic original. It is recited at festivals and special functions and on numerous other occasions. Every Muslim child is taught it as soon as it is old enough to learn. It is usually finished with an *amin*, the equivalent of the Christian "amen", and some old handwritten texts of the Qur'an actually insert the word at the end of a chapter as part of the text. The importance of this chapter can be seen from the following quote where it is singled out as the Qur'an's most significant passage:

And We have bestowed on you the Seven Oft-Repeated (verses) and the Exalted Qur'an. *Surah 15:87*

There are numerous references to this surah in the traditional Hadith literature. Muhammad is recorded as stating that the "seven oft-repeated" (*saba`ul-mathani*) were the seven verses of the chapter and that "the Exalted Qur'an" (*al-Qur'anal-`Adhim*) was also a title for the Surah (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.37). Another popular title for it is *Ummul-Qur'an*, the "Mother of the Qur'an". It is unique in that it is the only part of the Qur'an where there is a human address to God. Another tradition records Muhammad as stating very emphatically that its recital is crucial to any time of prayer:

He who does not recite Fatihat al-Kitab is not credited with having observed prayer. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.214).

Two other similar traditions record the Prophet as personally defining this chapter as the most significant in the Qur'an:

Shall I not teach you the most important Surah in the Qur'an? He said it is "Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.490).

"All praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Universe" is the epitome or basis of the Qur'an, the epitome or basis of the Book, and the seven oft-repeated verses. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.1, p.382).

During the official prayers recited five times daily it is only the *Imam*, the leader, who recites the actual prayers including this Surah. Nonetheless another tradition states that all Muslims should deliberately recite the *amin* at the end of it. Muhammad himself related that the angels of heaven themselves do so and that every Muslim who coincided his *amin* with theirs would have all his sins forgiven (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.1, p.416). The importance of the opening chapter to the Muslims of the world can hardly be over-emphasised.

Another short but very important chapter is known as *Suratul-Ikhlâs* (the "Chapter of Purity") and it reads as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Say: He is Allah, the One; Allah, the Eternal One; He does not beget, nor is he begotten, and like unto him there is not one. *Surah 112:1-4*

The unity of Allah is the central theme of the Qur'an and his sole and absolute Lordship over the Universe is constantly emphasised. This is usually done in opposition to the pagan idolatry of Muhammad's fellow countrymen but it is also levelled against the Christian belief in Jesus as the begotten Son of God. Muslims today regularly employ it in apologetic literature against Christianity and it is perhaps a defiant summary of the basic polemic of Islam against other faiths.

Muhammad is recorded as saying that "this Surah is equal to one-third of the Qur'an" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.494) and it is regularly recited as Muslims believe this is the same as reciting a third of the whole book. The Prophet once enquired of his companions whether any of them was capable of reciting one-third of it in one night and when they all expressed surprise he again stated that this Surah "is equivalent to a third of the Qur'an" (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.387). Another tradition records him one day hearing a man reciting this chapter and saying that he was assured of Paradise (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.99). One of his companions also heard another Muslim reciting it repeatedly one night and, taking the chapter to be a very short one and seeing no point himself in reciting it continuously, he objected to Muhammad but was likewise told that it was by Allah's direction a third of the book (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.1, p.383).

Only one other Surah is regarded with the same awe as these two and that is the 36th chapter of the Qur'an known as *Suratu-Ya-Sin* after the two letters *ya* and *sin* appearing as typically unexplained letters at its beginning. Muslim calligraphers have often selected its first few verses as a subject for intricate artistic skills as it has often been taught that this Surah is the heart of the Qur'an and that Allah writes in exchange for anyone who recites it the reward of reading the whole Qur'an ten times. It is accordingly regularly found in Muslim prayer booklets, very often being printed by itself as a separate booklet.

TYPICAL CLICHES AND OTHER SIGNIFICANT PASSAGES

The Qur'an is a book full of sharp cliches which add to its rhythmic character. Perhaps the most obvious of these are the names given to Allah (usually two) after a verse concentrating on him or his actions. For example he is described as *Allaaha-Tawwaabaan-Rahiimaan*, "Allah the Oft-Returning, the Merciful" (*Surah 4:64*) at the end of a passage declaring that unbelievers would have found Allah so if they had only come to the Prophet after first disobeying him and asking forgiveness with him likewise praying for their forgiveness.

Another passage states that Allah raised Jesus up to himself when the Jews sought to kill him, concluding *wa kaana Allaahu `Aziizaaan Hakiimaan*, "And Allah is the Mighty, the Wise" (*Surah 4:158*). These names of Allah were in time compiled into ninety-nine in all.

There are a few verses in the Qur'an of exceptional character and one of the most well-known is the *ayatul-kursi*, the "Throne verse". It is perhaps the most eloquent declaration in the book of Allah's universal sovereignty over his creation and starts and finishes with two typical names indicative of his surpassing power and glory. It stands out by itself in the longest chapter of the Qur'an and reads as follows:

Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Neither slumber nor sleep seize Him. To Him is everything that is in the heavens or on the earth. Who is there that can intercede with Him except as He permits. He knows what lies before them and what is after them and they will comprehend nothing of His knowledge save as He wills. His Throne covers the heavens and the earth and He has no tiredness in preserving them. He is the Most-High, the Exalted. *Surah 2:255*

Although the *Suratul-Fatihah* is regarded as the most important chapter in the Qur'an this particular verse was said by Muhammad to be the foremost in the book:

Ubayy b. Ka'b said: The Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: Abu al-Mundhir, which verse of Allah's book that you have is the greatest? I replied: Allah and his Apostle know best. He said: Abu al-Mundhir, which verse of Allah's book that you have is greatest? I said: Allah, there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal. Thereupon he struck me on the breast and said: May knowledge be pleasant for you, Abu al-Mundhir. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.1, p.383).

Another very striking verse in a passage from the Medinan period of Muhammad's prophetic mission also stands out. This time, although Allah is again its central theme, the text moves into the mystical realm in its description of his glory and it is accordingly highly esteemed by the Sufis, the mystics of Islam. It reads:

Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp; the Lamp enclosed in a Glass; the Glass as it were a Brilliant Star, lit from a blessed tree, an Olive neither of the East nor the West, whose Oil is well-nigh luminous though fire has scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah guides whom He wills to His light and Allah sets forth parables for men, and Allah knows all things. *Surah 24:35*

Mention should be made of the last two surahs of the Qur'an. These are, like the opening chapter, very short and once again the Muslim worshipper is the speaker although on this occasion he does not address his praise to Allah but recites an incantation seeking protection firstly from the Lord of the dawn against the mischief of talismans, the darkness, those who practise secret spells and those who practise magical envy such as the well-known "Evil-Eye" (*Surah 113:1-5*). This chapter is known as *Suratul-Falaq* ("The Dawn") while the second is known as *Suratul-Nas* ("Mankind") as Allah is here described as the Lord of mankind from whom protection is sought against the mischief of the Whisperers among both devils and men (*Surah 114:1-6*).

Ayishah, one of Muhammad's wives, related that these two stories had a special significance and that he regularly used them. Every night he used to cup his hands together and blow over them after reciting both surahs as well as *Suratul-Ikhlas*. He would then rub his hands over whatever parts of his body he could reach, starting with his head, face and the front of his body. He used to do this three times. Whenever he was ill he would recite them again and blow breath over his body. Ayishah at such times also used to recite them over him and rub his

hands over his body hoping for its blessings (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.495). One of his companions recorded the following incident where Muhammad specially recommended the recitation of these two Surahs as a form of protection:

`Uqbah b. `Amir said: While I was travelling with the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) between Al-Juhfah and al-Abwa, a wind and intense darkness enveloped us, whereupon the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) began to seek refuge in Allah, reciting: "I seek refuge in the Lord of the dawn" and "I seek refuge in the Lord of men". He then said: `Uqbah, use them when seeking refuge in Allah, for no one can use anything to compare with them for the purpose. He said: I heard him reciting them when he led the people in prayer. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.1, p.383).

There is great merit to the Muslim in reciting any part of the Qur'an but these surahs and passages have an exceptional value and the Prophet's own endorsement of each of them in turn has secured their prominence and incessant recitation whenever appropriate.

4. THE MECCAN AND MEDINAN SURAHS

THE STYLE AND CHARACTER OF THE TWO PERIODS

One of the problems confronting any student of the Qur'an is the fact that the book not only has no chronological sequence but that the various surahs themselves are often composed of passages from both the Meccan and Medinan periods of Muhammad's mission. Nonetheless there is a clear distinction between them which can be discerned in the nature of the two phases. While in Mecca Muhammad saw himself primarily as a warner to draw his people away from idolatry and the surahs from this time are generally prophetic and exhortative in character. In Medina, however, Muhammad was the leader of a community and the surahs from this period in contrast to the Meccan passages are often cumbersome and legalistic in content and style.

The Meccan surahs concentrate on the issues which first impressed themselves upon Muhammad, in particular the waywardness of his own people, the judgment to come, and the destiny of all men to heaven or hell. Perhaps the most striking issue here is *al-Yaum*, "the Day", the Great Day of Judgment to come. The Qur'an concentrates all its warnings around this awful event. Graphic language is used to describe it. For example it is described as "totally overwhelming" (*Surah 88:1*), hell itself will be brought face-to-face with mankind on it (*Surah 89:23*) and no soul shall have power to help another for the Command, that day, shall belong to Allah alone (*Surah 82:19*). The destiny of unbelievers shall be horrific:

Some faces on that Day will be humiliated, labouring, exhausted; roasting in a blazing fire, drinking from a boiling hot spring; no food for them but a thorny cactus, neither nourishing nor relieving hunger. *Surah 88:2-7*

On the other hand believers will be blessed that Day. They will laugh at the unbelievers (*Surah 83:34*), their surroundings will be as comfortable as they could wish with a light of beauty and joy over them (*Surah 76:11*), they will be lavishly adorned and will drink of a pure and holy wine (*Surah 76:21*). Much of the Qur'anic concept of heaven follows Biblical principles but the emphasis seems to be on the pleasure and ease of the believer's circumstances rather than the renewed knowledge of God's perfect character within them. In contrast to the terrors of hell in the passage quoted the text says of the inhabitants of paradise:

Other faces will be joyful, pleased with their efforts, in a sublime Garden, hearing no vain-talk. Therein will be a bubbling fountain, therein couches raised up and goblets set out, cushions arrayed and carpets spread out. *Surah 88:8-16*

In all this the Prophet is reminded that he is only a warner for those who are ready to fear the Day (*Surah 79:45*). Yet, once he became established in Medina, the tone began to change. In Mecca the Qur'an spoke directly to Muhammad or to his countrymen generally, but in Medina one finds the majority of passages addressing the community of believers with the introduction *Yaa ayyuhallathiina aa`manuu* - "O you who truly believe". What follows is often of a legislative nature and most of the laws of Islam, the *shari`ah*, are derived from these

sections. The concern here is chiefly the social ethics of the Muslim *ummah*, the conduct of campaigns and battles, general customs and behaviour and religious scruples regarding such things as marriages and deaths.

The Medinan surahs deal with the abolition of usury and interest (*Surah 2:278*), the laws of inheritance (*Surah 4:11-12*), the prohibited degrees of relationship (*Surah 4:23*), the property of orphans (*Surah 4:6-10*), the prohibitions on wine and gambling (*Surah 5:93-94*) and the like.

One of the great themes of these surahs is the person of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad himself. While he is often addressed directly in the Meccan surahs, his own position is seen to be no more than to be a communicator of Allah's revelations. Here, however, he comes to the fore and one of the great injunctions in these later passages is to obey Allah and his Messenger (*Surah 48:17*) as loyalty to the one is seen to be inseparable from faithfulness to the other.

In the Medinan surahs passages dealing with the Great Day and the destiny of mankind give way to new revelations dealing with the personal concerns of the Prophet's private life. For example he is given a special licence to take to himself and marry any believing woman who is willing to devote herself to him – a permission expressly granted to him and not to believers generally "so that there should be no difficulty for you" (*Surah 33:50*). In the next verse of a book said to be eternal and of uncreated speech preserved on a special tablet in heaven, he is told that he can choose for himself which of his wives he would like to be with at any time and that he would be doing no wrong if he preferred one over another and showed partiality to her. Believers are also commanded to send their blessings on him and to salute him with all respect because Allah and all his angels do so (*Surah 33:56*). Furthermore those who annoy and irritate him (and, perforce, Allah as well) will be cursed by Allah in both this world and the next (*Surah 33:57*). His companions are even given strict details regarding etiquette to be observed when approaching his chambers:

O you who truly believe! Do not enter the houses of the Prophet until leave is given you for a meal and then without you watching for its hour. But when you are invited, then enter, and when you have had the meal, disperse without lingering for idle talk for this irritates the Prophet and he is ashamed before you – but Allah is not ashamed to tell you the truth! *Surah 33:53*

The arrangement of the chapters of the Qur'an, whereby the early Meccan surahs are placed at the end of the book and the Medinan surahs at the beginning, is confusing and the casual reader will miss the clear transition but it is there – the sharp awareness of eternal issues giving way to concerns of a more practical, immediate and earthly nature.

THE THEORY OF ABROGATION IN THE QUR'AN

One of the unique features of the Qur'an is its teaching that Allah can abrogate earlier teachings in his Scriptures by substituting something else in their place. This applies not only to the Scriptures prior to Islam but to the Qur'an itself. There is a clear doctrine in the book that some of its earlier verses are cancelled by later revelations. Muhammad always saw Allah as the absolute sovereign of the universe and the idea that he could alter his commands and replace them obviously appeared to be in harmony with his supreme rule and he saw no reason to question it. The most prominent verse in the Qur'an setting forth the doctrine reads:

We do not abrogate a verse or let it be forgotten without bringing a better or similar one. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things? *Surah 2:106*

In the early days of Islam there was no dispute about the meaning of this text. It was universally accepted that it meant that certain verses and passages of the Qur'an could be substituted by later ones and lists were drawn up of texts abrogated by later revelations. For example in one place the Qur'an teaches that the drinking of wine can have both good and bad effects (*Surah 2:219*) and when Muhammad first established himself as the ruler of the Muslim community at Medina his followers were told not to come to prayers in a drunken state (*Surah 4:43*). Later, however, the consumption of alcohol was abolished altogether (*Surah 5:93-94*).

Two of the greatest of the early commentators of the Qur'an, Baidawi and Zamakhshari, attempted to interpret the purpose of this facet of Qur'anic revelation in the context of a definite substitution of one passage by another. Zamakhshari taught that Surah 2:106 was revealed to counter the objections of the pagan Arabs that Muhammad at times would command his followers to do a certain thing and would later forbid it and command the opposite. He believed, unlike other commentators who held that the abrogated verses remained in the Qur'an, that Allah expressly removes (*azala*) one passage to insert another. He commands the angel of communication, *Jibril*, to announce that one passage is cancelled either by its abolition or by its replacement with another passage.

Baidawi likewise taught that the *mansukh* verse, the "abrogated" text, became of no effect. It was no longer a pious act to recite it and no law based on it could be valid any longer. He argued that the *naskh* verses which came in the place of the cancelled texts were inserted as each occasion required. Laws are formulated by Allah for the good of mankind and as the needs and circumstances change with time and the individual it becomes necessary for the rules that regulate them to be adapted as well. What may be beneficial at one time can be harmful at another. So Allah reserves to himself the right to alter his revelations as he pleases.

It is not possible to determine which texts, if any, were taken out of the Qur'an once they were abrogated but another typical example of a new passage overruling an earlier one due to force of circumstances is found in the context of praying and reading the Qur'an at night. At Mecca the practice went on into the early hours of the morning when the early Muslims were not so pressed with communal affairs. In one of the earliest passages to be revealed they were commanded to pray for approximately half of each night and to recite the Qur'an at the same time (*Surah 73:2-4*). Once they were settled in Medina, however, the daily concerns of attending to the needs of the growing Muslim community made it very hard for them to maintain long hours awake at night and so the command was relaxed. The same Surah goes on in a later passage to say that, while Allah is aware that they stand up to half the night in prayer, he knows they cannot keep count of the time they are so engaged and so he only expects them to read the Qur'an and pray for as much as may be comfortable to them. He knows that some are ill and others are weary travellers and that yet others are fighting in campaigns (*Surah 73:20*). Thus the fixed injunctions of the earlier passage were abrogated.

There are other verses in the Qur'an clearly teaching that Allah can change his revelations and substitute one for another as he pleases:

When We exchange a verse in place of another verse, and Allah knows best what he is sending down, they say "You are but a forger!", but most of them have no understanding. *Surah 16:101*

Allah abolishes and establishes what he pleases for with him is the Mother of the Book. *Surah 13:39*

The doctrine of abrogation of actual verses of the Qur'an was clearly taught and indeed fixed by the *fuqaha*, the early jurists of Islam. Nonetheless modern Muslim scholars, chastened by the suggestion that the Qur'an is not a perfect scripture if some of its texts have been superseded by others, or at worse actually removed from the book, attempt to prove that the Qur'an is really teaching that what Allah does is to abrogate some of the previous scriptures (each of which is known in the Qur'an as a *kitab*, a "book") and not passages of the Qur'an as such.

This line of reasoning cannot be accepted as the Qur'an never says that a *kitab* is abrogated in its entirety but rather that Allah substitutes one *ayah* for another *ayah* (*Surah 16:101*). The word often means "signs" (such as the miracles of Jesus) but throughout the Qur'an it also refers to actual verses of the book itself. Allah has sent down his revelations (or verses – *ayat*) to Muhammad which none but the perverse reject (*Surah 2:99*). It was the practice of cancelling verses or overruling their contents with later texts that made the Prophet's opponents charge him with being a forger as this seemed to be a convenient way to explain changes in the actual text of the Qur'an itself.

In Surah 2:106 the text speaks not only of Allah's revelations being abrogated but also being forgotten by his power – this could hardly refer to previous scriptures which were well-known and preserved throughout the known world in thousands of manuscripts. It could only refer to actual verses of the Qur'an which had come to be neglected and forgotten by Muhammad and his companions over a period of time.

Chapter Two

Basic Qur'anic Doctrines and Teachings

1. THE PRINCIPLE TENETS OF ISLAMIC FAITH

THE QUR'ANIC CONCEPT OF SIN AND SALVATION

Although there is no chronological sequence of events or teachings in the chapters of the Qur'an it is significant to find the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall at the beginning of the book. The narrative is very similar to the account in Genesis where God gives him dominion over the earth and places him there as his *khalifah*, his "representative". He likewise puts him in a bountiful garden, commanding him only to refrain from eating of one tree. Satan, however, caused him and his wife (not named in the Qur'an) to lose their blissful state and they were sent down out of it and told their dwelling place would be on *al-ardh*, "the earth", with enmity between their offspring. The Qur'an adds, however, that Adam learnt words of inspiration from his Lord who turned in mercy towards him (*Surah 2:30-39*). Because the Qur'an twice uses the word *habata* (to "get down") in describing the order against them Muslims have taught that the Garden was originally in heaven and that they were thrown down to the earth after their transgression. Nevertheless at the beginning of the narrative Allah is recorded as telling his angels specifically that he would create his representative *fil ardh*, "on the earth" (*Surah 2:30*), and it appears that the fall was not from heaven but from a state of righteous bliss. It is perhaps also from the Qur'anic title *Jannati `Adn* in *Surah 9:72* that Muslims presume it must have been in heaven as *Jannat* in this verse and elsewhere in the text refers to Paradise itself and this is believed to be the "Garden of Eden" where Adam and Eve were. Nevertheless the correct translation of the expression here is simply "gardens of bliss" as the definite article is missing for both words.

In another passage the Qur'an states that Satan began to whisper suggestions to them and brought about their fall by deceit. They tasted of their shame and acknowledged before Allah that they had wronged their souls and, if he would not forgive them and show mercy to them, they would assuredly be lost (*Surah 7:20-23*). Allah then appeals directly to mankind on no less than three occasions in the following verses as *Bani Adam* ("Children of Adam") who should not be ashamed like them or be seduced as they were by Satan. Muslims believe that Adam was a prophet, although he is never actually given this honour in the Qur'an, because he was taught *kalimat* ("words") from his Lord (*Surah 2:37*) implying that he was inspired by messages as other prophets were. As Muslims further believe that all prophets were sinless they endeavour to minimise his disobedience by arguing that it was just a "mistake" and that he had simply "forgotten" the command not to eat of the tree. It is very hard to see how he could have forgotten it when one reads that Satan actually *reminded* him of the order while tempting him to eat of it (*Surah 7:20*). It would also be interesting to know how sin came into the world if not through this initial rebellion and who it was who introduced it.

The Qur'an follows the Bible in setting human wrongdoing at the very beginning of creation and it sees the transgression of Adam and Eve as the prime example of sinfulness. It does not teach that men are bound in sin and need to be regenerated as the Bible does but it does view sin as the great problem in man's relationship with God. It therefore, like the Bible, regards the quest for salvation as the supreme goal of human daily living. The burden rests solely on the individual to gain his own approval from Allah, however, as no intercession can be expected from anyone on his behalf:

Then guard against a Day when one soul will not avail another, nor will intercession be accepted from it, nor will recompense be taken, nor will there be any assistance. *Surah 2:48*

The Qur'an uses three different words for sin. The words *ithm* and *dhanb* are usually used to define transgressions of ceremonial laws and prescribed patterns of conduct while *khati'ah* is used to define serious acts

of defiance against Allah and failing to live up to his standards. All who persist in such behaviour will be condemned and punished both now and in the next life for their wrongdoing. Those who believe in vanities or other falsehoods will likewise be judged (*Surah 47:3*).

Nonetheless one of the favourite themes of the Qur'an is that Allah is *Ghafiurun-Rahim*, "All-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (*Surah 9:5*). These two titles appear together no less than sixty-six times in the text. The only unforgivable sin in Islam is *shirk*, namely "associating" partners with Allah:

Allah does not forgive associating anything with him, He will forgive anything else to whom He pleases. Whoever associates anything with Allah commits a heinous sin. *Surah 4:48*

There will be no forgiveness for those who die in unbelief nor will it help anyone to do evil until death faces him and to then repent (*Surah 4:18*) but forgiveness is freely available to all who, sinning in ignorance, repent towards Allah for he will turn to them in mercy (*Surah 4:17*). The doctrine of salvation in the Qur'an, although no attempt is made to specifically define it anywhere, is perhaps best summed up in this text:

Those who repent, and believe, and do good works will inherit Paradise and will suffer no wrong. *Surah 19:60*

Men are seen to be prone to sin and to have lost Paradise. In the Qur'an, however, they do not have a sinful nature as such and are not radically estranged from Allah. Provided they repent of their wrongdoing, believe in Allah and practise works of righteousness they will be forgiven and regain Paradise. It is clear from another passage, however, that true belief is seen to be the faith of a Muslim alone who submits to Allah. It is not only those who believe and do good works but specifically those "who believe in what is sent down to Muhammad" (*Surah 47:2*).

The word "salvation" (*najat*) occurs only once in the Qur'an (*Surah 40:41*) and is used in the context of being delivered from the Fire of Hell (*an-Nar*). The theme itself is nevertheless found throughout the book as the purpose of all human existence on earth. The believer who practises his faith, who leaves his home to fight in the way of Allah to help his Prophet (*Surah 8:75*), who does no harm to others and does his best to keep the commandments of Allah has the best hope of acceptance. Allah will forgive his worst sins and reward the best of them and he will be pardoned and accepted at the Judgment. Although forgiveness is purely the prerogative of Allah it will be bestowed on all who truly seek his face.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT AND ETERNAL ISSUES IN THE QUR'AN

Like the Bible the Qur'an sees all history moving inexorably towards one great climax when humanity will be called to account and all men will be divided into two groups, some for heaven and the rest for hell. This great Day is seen likewise to be a time when all the dead will be resurrected to be judged with the living. It is called *Yaum al-Qiyamah*, the "Day of Resurrection" (*Surah 2:85*) as well as *Yaum al-Ba`th*, the "Day of Awakening" (*Surah 30:56*). It will be a sudden event but one which is sure to come with its signs already manifest. It will be a day of doom with Allah for unbelievers when an absolutely just judgment will be exercised. Every man will give an account of himself and all good and evil deeds will be weighed in a *mizan*, a "balance". Those who deny the Day and who reject the signs of Allah will find their record in *Sijjin*, a register inscribing their actions and destiny to Hell. Believers, however, who have lived righteously and are nearest to Allah will find their records inscribed in *'Illiyun*, a register consigning them to the delights of Paradise (*Surah 83:7-28*).

Although it is described as a day, its length in one place is said to be "a thousand years" according to human reckoning (*Surah 32:5*). Another passage, however, says it will be "fifty thousand years" (*Surah 70:4*). The contradiction arises from the addition of the word *khamsin* in the second text. Muslim commentators have endeavoured to explain this contradiction away by saying either that it indicates that no one really knows what time Allah intends in these passages, or that they are figurative and are not to be taken literally, or that they are used purely to emphasise the length and terribleness of the Day.

Most men and women will not live long enough to see this Day interrupting their lives. For them the awful climax that will face them is the prospect of Death, *al-Maut*. It is called in the Qur'an *al-Yaqin*, "the Certainty"

(*Surah 15:99*). Every soul is destined to taste of it and from it there is no escape (*Surah 2:185*). Even though unbelievers may do their best to ignore it or hide from its reckoning, it will surely find them in due course (*Surah 4:78*). Believers, however, need have no fear of it.

While Hell is seen as a place of infernal fire and boiling liquids the Qur'anic concept of Paradise is one of great bliss where its inhabitants will have their thirst slaked with pure wine sealed with musk and mixed with *tasnim*, a nectar of the finest taste (*Surah 83:25-27*). Their abodes will be in enclosed gardens with well-endowed maidens and overflowing cups. These maidens will be beautiful with lustrous eyes, perpetual virgins much to be desired and of equal age with the believers (*Surah 56:22,36-37*). They will recline on couches while these dark-eyed damsels and servants of eternal youth will attend to their needs.

Nothing is said of the rewards for believing women in Paradise in the Qur'an and the book seems to concentrate solely on male delights and fancies. The emphasis, in any event, is on the amenable circumstances of the believer in heaven rather than on the transformation of his own character and the personal knowledge of God. It seems that one of the key needs of men which the Qur'an recognises is the need in the future life for sensual gratification and so the bliss of Paradise is shown to be the full enjoyment of delicious drinks, delightful surroundings and the attendance of gorgeous women. In the same way, unlike the Bible, the Qur'an sees the present earthly distinction between male and female perpetuated in Heaven.

Hell, on the other hand, is a consuming fire where its inhabitants will be tormented incessantly in chains and flames. It allows nothing to endure yet it leaves nothing alone to escape its horrors forever. It darkens and changes the colour of man (*Surah 74:28-29*). Boiling water will be the drink of its unfortunate victims at times and at others a dark, murky and icy-cold fluid (*Surah 38:57*). Although they will never experience life again, death too will be refused to them as they appeal to the angel in charge over them to end their despair and punishment:

They will cry: "O Malik! Let your Lord make an end of us". He will reply, "Nay, you will surely abide (herein forever)". *Surah 43:77*

They will likewise desire to return to earth so that they could make amends for their wrongdoing but this too will be denied and refused. The Fire will burn their faces and they will grimace with their lips displaced. They will appeal to Allah to bring them out of Hell promising never to do evil again, but he will demand that they be driven back into it (*Surah 23:103-108*). The unquenching desire of the Fire to consume yet more and more is graphically portrayed in this verse:

One day We will ask *Jahannam* (Hell), "Are you filled to the full yet?" It will reply, "Are there yet more (to come)?" *Surah 50:30*

In many ways the principle tenets of Qur'anic doctrine about the basic relationship between God and mankind, the quest for salvation and the destiny of believers and unbelievers to Heaven and Hell respectively are similar to the Biblical perspective. On the other hand there is no awareness of the need for a Redeemer to deliver all men, who are enemies of God by nature, from the bondage of sin and death. Heaven and Hell likewise, while being similar in some respects to the Biblical concept, are nonetheless defined principally by the physical delights and torments their inmates will experience rather than by the difference of being transformed into God's own likeness or being cast out of his presence forever. The emphasis is on the circumstances surrounding the believer and unbeliever respectively.

Ultimately the similarities between the two books are overshadowed by the contrasts. The former indicate little more than common ground upon which the doctrines of each respective book are based. The final product, however, separates Islam and Christianity into two totally different religions. The one settles into a legalistic creed based on the good works and ceremonial observances of its adherents while the other blossoms into a testimony of God's wondrous grace to be responded to in faith and obedient gratitude.

2. STORIES OF BIBLICAL AND OTHER PROPHETS

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHETS AND OTHERS IN THE QUR'AN

One of the great themes of the Qur'an is the prophetic office of Allah's appointed messengers throughout history. A prophet is a *nabi* although the plural use of the word (*anbiya* or *nabiyyin*) is usually employed in the book. A prophet may also be called a *rasul* meaning a "messenger" and Jesus and Muhammad are particularly referred to by this title. Prophets are Allah's warners sent as his representatives to lead mankind into his knowledge and truth:

Mankind was a single community to whom Allah sent his prophets with his pronouncements and warnings; and with them he sent down the Scripture in truth to judge between people in matters wherein they differed. *Surah 2:213*

Muslims are commanded to believe in all the true prophets of Allah without making any distinction between them, the Qur'an citing Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and Jesus specifically as prophets whom he had sent in former times (*Surah 3:84*). Islam has taken over the whole prophetic line of the Judeo-Christian heritage, the Qur'an acknowledging that *al-Kitab* ("the Scripture"), *al-Hukm* ("the Judgment") and *al-Nubuwwah* ("the Prophethood") were sent particularly to the Children of Israel (*Surah 45:16*). Many of the stories of these prophets follow Biblical narratives to some extent while being supplemented with material from Jewish folklore. On the whole the records in the Qur'an are rather sketchy and, as has been seen, anyone reading these without a knowledge of the Bible will find it hard to ascertain precisely what the book is speaking about.

While much is said about the great patriarchs of early Israelite history none of the great writing prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and Jeremiah is mentioned in the book. Significantly the sole figure spoken of from the later period is Jonah, the only prophet from this time of whom a brief biographical record appears in the Bible.

The other great omission in the Qur'anic portrayal of the Old Testament prophetic history is the lack of any reference to sacrifices as an integral part of Israelite religion. The exhaustive instructions given to Moses about sin offerings, burnt offerings and other sacrifices are glossed over in the Qur'an. The Temple of the Jews, although mentioned in the Qur'an (*Surah 17:7*), is not set forth as the focal point of the sacrificial rituals recorded extensively in the Old Testament. Significantly, although the Qur'an acknowledges the prophethood of Jesus Christ it does not even remotely allude to his atoning work as the one great sacrifice of all time to reconcile men to God.

It seems that Muhammad's own knowledge of Biblical prophetic history grew as he spent time in conversation with Jews and educated men of his own nation. Without firsthand access to the whole record, however, he was unable to master the subject. Nonetheless the accuracy of his accounts improves as his knowledge increases. A good example is the story of *Lut*, the Prophet Lot in the Qur'an. The mere fact that he should be included among the list of true prophets indicates Christian influence upon Muhammad as it is only in later Jewish documents that one finds him mentioned as such. In the Bible it is only in 2 Peter 7-8 that Lot is described (on no less than three occasions nonetheless) as a "righteous" figure on the same level as Noah, Abraham and the other early patriarchs.

The early records of his flight from Sodom in the Qur'an make no mention of the destruction of the city and simply state that he was saved with members of his family while his own people, who had opposed him, were destroyed. Furthermore reference is made only to an "old woman" who lingered behind and was also destroyed (*Surahs 26:171, 37:135*). In later passages, however, the visit of the angelic messengers in human form is first recorded and this time it is clearly stated that it was his *wife* who was the woman who lagged behind (*Surah 27:57*).

In another later passage Abraham is linked to the story for the first time as the first person whom the angels visited to announce their mission to him and their purpose to save his nephew. This time mention is actually made of a city where Lot and his opponents were situated but, typically, it is not named. The angels, on arriving at the city, immediately disclose their identities and intention to Lot with a command to him to be fully prepared

to flee by night with his family without looking back for any reason. Allah's decree that the offenders in the city would be destroyed by the morning is then also announced to him (*Surah 15:51-66*).

Only after this do the inhabitants of the city command Lot to bring out the young men who had come to him. Lot duly protests that they are his guests and offers them his daughters. By the morning, however, Allah's wrath rains down upon them and they are destroyed. The story generally follows the Biblical record except that in the Bible the angels only disclose their true identities and design after Lot's altercation with the men of the city. In placing this disclosure before the event, however, an enigma appears in the Qur'an. Lot would surely have reacted more purposefully towards them had he known in advance that his guests were actually two angels from heaven with power to destroy them and their city.

In another passage, however, the story most closely approximates the Biblical account. Abraham's prayer for the deliverance of Lot's people is now mentioned and it is only after the young men in the city demand Lot's guests to be delivered to them that they finally disclose to him that they are messengers from his Lord and that he was safe from their designs and should flee the city during the night (*Surah 11:74-81*).

This brief analysis is not exceptional, however. If there were only one or two instances of the kind in the Qur'an they could possibly be explained away. There are so many, however, that the conclusion can hardly be resisted that, as his own personal knowledge of Biblical records increased, so his accounts of them in the Qur'an became more accurate, and that he was receiving his information not by revelation from above but from various sources of information around him.

JESUS AND HIS MOTHER MARY IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an mentions four New Testament personalities by name: *'Isa* (Jesus), *Maryam* (his mother Mary), *Yahya* (John the Baptist) and *Zakariya* (John's father). As mentioned earlier Mary is the only woman mentioned by name in the book and she has a place of considerable esteem. Her importance stems primarily from her status as the virgin-mother of Jesus. The narrative of his conception and birth is set out extensively in Surahs 3:42-47 and 19:16-34. Mary's honour is defined in the following passage:

And (remember) her who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her of Our spirit and appointed her and her son as a sign to all the worlds. *Surah 21:91*

Jesus is highly respected in the Qur'an as one of the great prophets of God. He is given unique titles, such as *al-Masih* ("the Messiah"), *Kalimatuhu* (Allah's Word) and *Ruhun-minhu* (a spirit from him) – all titles ascribed to him alone (*Surah 4:171*) although no attempt is made to explain them. Not only is his virgin-birth recorded in terms similar to those found in the Bible but his ascent to heaven at the end of his life is likewise acknowledged (*Surah 4:158*). An allusion appears to be made in the book to his return to earth at the end of time as a Sign of the Hour (*Surah 43:61*). The Qur'an also acknowledges that he was able to perform many mighty miracles by leave of Allah such as the power to give life to the clay figure of a bird, to heal lepers and those born blind, and to bring back the dead to life (*Surah 5:113*). Once again, although the Qur'an generally follows Biblical records it varies in many ways that again give the impression that Muhammad was not fully informed of his subject and was relying on sources around him.

On one occasion Jesus' disciples are said to have challenged him by enquiring whether his Lord could send down a table from heaven filled with food. They assured him they only wanted to witness such a miracle to confirm that all he had told them was the truth. Jesus duly prayed that God would send down such a table and, although agreeing to do so, God is said to have expressed very clearly his disapproval of their lack of faith (*Surah 5:115-118*). The narrative appears to confuse the demand of the Israelites in the desert at the time of Moses, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" (*Psalms 78:19*) with the story of the Last Supper in the New Testament when Jesus sat at table with his disciples and gave them bread to eat and wine to drink as symbols of his body and blood to be broken and shed for them respectively.

While the Qur'an goes a long way towards agreeing with the Bible in its records of Jesus' personality and life it categorically denies the two most important features of his course from a Christian perspective. Firstly, it categorically denies that he was crucified in these words:

They said, "We killed the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah", but they killed him not, nor did they crucify him, but so it was made to appear to them. Those who differ therein are full of doubt without knowledge and only speculation to follow. Assuredly they did not kill him, but Allah raised him up, and Allah is the Mighty, the Wise. *Surah 4:157-158*

This is actually the only place where the Qur'an denies the crucifixion and it regards it solely as a slander of the Jews without any reference to Christian belief in it or its atoning purpose. Nevertheless the denial of Jesus' death on a cross is one of the emphatic points of dispute between Christianity and Islam. The explanation that it "was made to appear to them" that they had crucified him has been generally interpreted to mean that Allah made someone else look just like Jesus and that this person was then crucified in his place. Jesus is believed to have been taken up alive to heaven without dying to return at the end of time.

The deity of Jesus is even more emphatically denied. To ascribe a partner to Allah is regarded as a great blasphemy and the vehemence with which the Qur'an rejects the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God comes out very clearly in this passage:

The Christians say that the Messiah is the Son of God. That is but a saying with their mouth. They only imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be upon them! How they are deluded away from the truth! *Surah 9:30*

Elsewhere the Qur'an exclaims that is far from the glory of Allah that he should have a son (*Surah 4:171*) and that to take the Messiah as Lord is a great calumny as this ascribes a partner to Allah who is only one God (*Surah 9:31*). Likewise it declares that it is blasphemy to allege that Allah is the Messiah, the son of Mary, when Allah could destroy both Jesus and his mother by his power if he so willed (*Surah 5:19*). He is in Allah's sight just like Adam since both were created solely by the Word of Allah who simply said "Be!", and they came to be (*Surah 3:59*).

Jesus Christ is set forth in the Qur'an solely as a prophet like those who went before him and no different to Muhammad, the last prophet, whose coming he is alleged to have foretold (*Surah 61:6*). It seems that Muhammad, in denouncing the pagan Arabs of his day who believed their idols were the daughters of Allah who would intercede with him on their behalf, could not see any difference in Christian belief about Jesus when he was told that he was the Son of God who would intercede for his own people. Both beliefs are dismissed as *kufir*, the blasphemy of unbelief against Allah, particularly as Jesus himself called his people to worship Allah, his Lord and theirs, one God with whom no other gods could be joined (*Surah 5:75*).

While Christians speak freely of "Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (the expression occurs in 2 Peter 3:18), the Qur'an's response seems to be that, while almost every other facet of his life and character can be admitted, he is *neither* Lord *nor* Saviour. This denial, incorporated as it is into the actual Scripture of the Muslims, is the major reason why Islam is more antagonistic towards Christian belief than any other religion or philosophy in the world.

3. OTHER FAITHS AND SCRIPTURES IN THE QUR'AN

TAWRAAT AND INJIL: THE REVEALED FORMER SCRIPTURES

Long before his prophetic mission Muhammad knew that the Jews and Christians scattered throughout Arabia possessed certain holy writings which were jealously preserved in the original languages in which they had first been written. When he began to receive revelations in his mother-tongue, Arabic, he believed that he too had been inspired to lead his own people in the right path and his scripture soon became known as *al-Qur'an*, "the Recitation". The scripture of the Jews he called *at-Tawraat*, "the Law", and the holy writings of the Christians he

titled *al-Injil*, "the Gospel". It is not known whether these were the express names which they gave to their own texts but these are their names in the Qur'an although nothing is said to explain their meaning or significance. The adherents of both faiths are called *Ahl-al-Kitab*, "the People of the Scripture", on numerous occasions in the book.

Although the *Ahl-al-Kitab* are spoken of respectfully in the Qur'an and are usually distinguished from pagan idolaters, the attitude is usually reproachful. They are seen as having deviated from the teachings of their scriptures and of exceeding the bounds of their religion (*Surah 4:171, 5:80*). If only they had truly believed and been righteous Allah would have forgiven all their sins and led them into gardens of bliss (*Surah 5:68*). If only they had stood firm on the *Tawraat* and the *Injil* they would have enjoyed perpetual happiness (*Surah 5:69*). They are boldly charged:

Say: "O People of the Scripture! You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand by the Law and the Gospel and all that has been sent down to you from your Lord". *Surah 5:71*

It seems that Muhammad believed that these two books had a similar form to his own Qur'an, namely that each was a scripture in which Allah alone was the author and which were delivered to their recipients respectively. The Qur'an was simply an Arabic equivalent of these former books. The *Injil* is expressly said to have been delivered to Jesus (*Surah 57:27*) while the *Tawraat* is described as the scripture deliberately sent to the Jews so that their prophets, scribes and rabbis might judge them by it (*Surah 5:47*). The *Kitab* ("Scripture") sent to Muhammad was revealed partly to confirm these former revelations and to guard their integrity. To each people a Law (*shir`at*) and an open Way (*Surah 5:51*).

The Qur'an does talk of other scriptures and testaments revealed to the prophets, in particular the *Zabur* ("Psalms") which was given to David (*Surah 4:163, 7:55*). It also states that Jesus personally attested the *Tawraat* before him, adding that he, however, had been sent to make some of its prohibitions lawful to the Children of Israel (*Surah 3:50*). Only one actual quote from the *Zabur* appears in the Qur'an, namely that "the meek shall inherit the earth" (*Surah 21:105* quoting Psalm 37:11). While there is no similar quotation from either the *Tawraat* or the *Injil*, much of their teaching reappears in various forms and the two books are obviously regarded as the major scriptures that preceded the Qur'an, often being mentioned together (e.g. *Surah 48:29*). Muhammad's own coming as a prophet from a people hitherto without a scripture is said to have been expressly foretold in these former texts:

Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures) which are with them, in the *Tawraat* and *Injil*, for he commands them what is just and forbids what is wrong. *Surah 7:157*

Over the first two centuries of Islam Muslim scholars faced an enigma. They soon discovered that the holy scriptures of the Jews and Christians were the Old and New Testaments respectively, two collections of shorter books which did not remotely resemble books like the Qur'an believed to be sent down to Moses and Jesus from Allah himself. Their consternation rose when they found that the New Testament is very Christian in content, time and again emphasising the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. At first they tried to reinterpret the two scriptures to make them harmonise with the Qur'an but scholars such as Ibn Hazm, who lived in the next era, began to teach that the actual *Tawraat* and *Injil* had been corrupted and that the Jewish and Christian scriptures were not reliable.

Support for this view was sought in the Qur'an itself but, although the book often charges the Jews and Christians with deviating from their teachings, they are never accused of actually perverting them. A party of them is charged with throwing away the *kitaballah* ("Scripture of Allah") behind their backs when Muhammad came to them (*Surah 2:101*). In the same way some of the Jews are accused of displacing words from their places by playing on them "with a twist of their tongues" (*Surah 4:46, 5:44*) while another group is blamed with knowingly perverting the Word of Allah after they had heard and understood it (*Surah 2:75*). In all these passages the accusation is purely one of twisting the meaning of words and never of tampering with the text itself. This gave rise to the doctrine of *tahrif-i-ma`nawi*, corruption of the message of the scriptures which was

the common charge against the Jews and Christians in early Islamic polemics and one perpetuated many times afterwards.

It was only later scholars who raised the doctrine of *tahrif-i-lafzi*, corruption of the text itself. It seemed to be the only way of explaining the obvious differences between the actual scriptures in the possession of the Jews and Christians and those described in the Qur'an. A favourite text used to support this approach reads as follows:

A party of them distort the Scripture with their tongues. You might think it is a part of the Scripture when it is not from the Scripture; and they say "This is from Allah" when it is not from Allah, and they speak falsehood against Allah and do so consciously knowing it. *Surah 3:78*

Once again, however, there is no direct charge of corrupting the text itself but only of reading something else in its place. Another verse often quoted in support of the argument is one which charges some of them with writing the Scripture with their own hands and claiming "This is from Allah" only to sell it for a price (*Surah 2:79*). Yet again there is no indictment of actually perverting the original texts.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, clearly teaches that the *Tawraat* and *Injil* were the actual scriptures which the Jews and Christians had in their possession at the time of Muhammad. The *Ahl-al-Injil* ("People of the Gospel") are commanded to judge by what Allah has revealed in it (*Surah 5:50*). In the same way the Jews are asked why they come to Muhammad for judgment when they have the *Tawraat* which contains the plain commands of Allah (*Surah 5:46*). They could not seriously have been so addressed if the texts in their hands had been changed and corrupted. The *Tawraat* is expressly said to have been *'indahum*, "with them", i.e. the Jews. The same expression is used in *Surah 7:157* for both the *Tawraat* and the *Injil*. There is not a hint in the Qur'an that Muhammad ever thought that the scriptures which the Jews and the Christians had among them were anything other than the original books he believed had been revealed to them by Allah himself.

In fact the Old and New Testaments cannot possibly be regarded as perverted editions of the original texts. They contain a variety of writings by different prophets and apostles including poetry, narratives, letters, biographies and prophetic texts. The Old Testament was compiled over many centuries and in no way takes the form of a book or scripture revealed to Moses. The New Testament likewise does not in any way resemble a revelation to Jesus but is a collection of writings of his immediate followers about him and the new covenant he put into effect.

It can only be presumed that, being ignorant of the actual contents of the books in the possession of the People of the Scripture, Muhammad misidentified the Old and New Testaments as a *Tawraat* and *Injil* revealed to Moses and Jesus respectively. Nonetheless the Qur'an testifies to their divine origin and authenticity.

THE QUR'AN'S ATTITUDE TO THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

Although their scriptures are highly respected the general tone of the Qur'an in respect of the Jews and Christians is negative, especially the Jews. Occasionally there are positive statements about some of them who are seen to be following a path of righteousness for whom a place in heaven has been preserved, as in this verse:

And there are among the People of the Scripture those who believe in Allah, and in what has been sent down to you, and in what has been sent down to them. Humbly bowing to Allah they will not sell the Signs of Allah for a miserable price. Their reward is with their Lord and Allah is quick in rendering account. *Surah 3:199*

There are other similar passages but it is invariably only a group of the People of the Scripture who will be accepted on the final Day. The rest are generally regarded as having turned away from the path of Allah who are accordingly opponents of the Prophet. Collectively they are ridiculed for their claims to have a monopoly over the truth, even over and against each other as in this verse:

The Jews say "The Christians have nothing (to stand) upon", while the Christians say "The Jews have nothing (to stand) upon". Yet they read the Scripture. They speak as those who are ignorant, but Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection in their dispute. *Surah 2:113*

In the same way they are rebuked for each saying that no one will enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian (*Surah 2:111*) as well as for each claiming that Abraham was an adherent of their faith when the Tawraat and Injil were only revealed sometime later (*Surah 3:65*). It is hard to follow the logic of the Qur'an at this point, however, for it goes on to say that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but an upright Muslim (*Surah 3:67*) – hardly possible if the Qur'an was only revealed after the Tawraat and the Injil.

The Jews are upbraided constantly in the Qur'an. They are charged with being willing to listen to any lie (*Surah 5:44, 5:67*) and are regarded as sworn enemies of the Muslims, determined to lead them astray from the right path. They are accused of being the most greedy of all the peoples on the earth, including idolaters, with each one clinging so much to life that he could wish to live a thousand years (*Surah 2:96*). Most of them are reviled as "rebellious wrongdoers" (*Surah 5:84*) and they are declared to be among the most persistent of Muhammad's opponents:

The most vehement of men in hostility towards the believers will you find to be the Jews and the idolaters. *Surah 5:85*

The Christians, on the other hand, are occasionally spoken of with more favour. In contrast to the enmity of the Jews the Qur'an says:

Nearest among them in love to the believers will you find those who say "We are Christians", that is because there are among them men devoted to learning and those who have turned away from the world, and they are not arrogant. *Surah 5:85*

They are also often censured, however, particularly for their tendency to withdraw into monasticism which Allah has not prescribed for any one (*Surah 57:27*) and for forgetting the covenant which Allah had made with them (*Surah 5:15*). They are further rebuked for taking their monks, priests and the Messiah the son of Mary as their lords when they were commanded to worship Allah alone (*Surah 9:31*). The chief charge is of exaggerating in their religion.

As time went on and Muhammad's armies, particularly near the end of his life, came into conflict with Christian armies in the north of Arabia his attitude towards them became more hostile. They are for the first time accused of being no better than pagan idolaters for speaking blasphemy against Allah in declaring that he is one of a triad of whom Mary and Jesus are the other two (*Surah 5:76*). They are castigated with the Jews in the same terms as rebellious transgressors against Allah's revealed laws. Although the Qur'an commends them for being nearest in love to the Muslims the latter are forbidden to associate too closely with them or befriend them:

O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your friends or protectors, they are friends and protectors to each other. Whoever among you who turns to them is one of them. Indeed Allah does not guide an unjust people. *Surah 5:54*

As a result of his numerous altercations with Jews and battles with Christians in his last days, Muhammad now calls on his own people to fight against them as well as pagan idolaters:

Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid that which Allah and his Apostle have forbidden, nor believe in the religion of truth including those among the People of the Scripture until they pay the poll-tax voluntarily and feel themselves subdued. *Surah 9:29*

Although there is at times a spirit of tolerance towards the Jews and Christians in the Qur'an and even a declaration that the truly pious among them will be rewarded in Paradise and find favour with Allah, the general attitude is animistic. Jointly they are seen to be serious opponents of the Prophet and his message and their presence is viewed as a threat to the well-being of the Muslims whom they are determined to lead astray.

4. PRIMARY QUR'ANIC LAWS AND OBLIGATIONS

THE SHARI'AH – THE PRESCRIBED LAWS OF ISLAM

Although Islam is a religion of fixed laws and regulations and has often been criticised as being legalistic in emphasis, the Qur'an itself is not a composition of rules and ordinances. Nonetheless it does deal at length with human relationships, prescribes many rituals and does legislate codes of behaviour, punishments and the like. Law in Islam has become known as the *shari'ah*, the "path" or way of life required to be followed to make a man a faithful Muslim, one who submits to Allah in truth. The word is not commonly used in the Qur'an but its appearance in the following text sums up its centrality to the Muslim faith:

Then We put you on the *shari'ah* (the right way), so follow it and do not follow the desires of those who are ignorant. *Surah 45:18*

The decalogue in the Christian Bible, more commonly known as the ten commandments, are the archetype of God's basic laws and while they are not set out in the Qur'an as categorically as they are in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21, they are nevertheless all set out in various passages. The Qur'an does, however, confirm that God's laws were given to Moses on two stone tablets:

And We inscribed for him everything in the tablets, both commandments and explanations of all things, (saying): "Hold these in earnestness and command your people to comply with their excellences. Soon I will show you the abode of the wicked". *Surah 7:145*

One passage in the Qur'an, *Surah 17:23-40*, almost reads like a passage out of Leviticus and many of the ten commandments are expressly repeated in it. God's command that he alone should be worshipped is coupled with an injunction to be kind to one's parents (*Surah 17:23*). Adultery is forbidden as a shameful and evil deed opening the way to other evils while the taking of another's life, except for a just cause, is likewise prohibited for Allah has made life sacred (*Surah 17:32-33*). Amputation is prescribed as the punishment for theft (*Surah 5:41*). No object of worship should be taken along with Allah as this leads idolaters justifiably to hell (*Surah 17:39*). The third commandment is also repeated in the Qur'an, it being said that as Allah's names are the most beautiful of all, those who profane his name will be punished (*Surah 7:180*). The institution of the Sabbath Day for the Jewish people as a day of strict observance which they were inclined to transgress is also mentioned (*Surah 7:163*). Speaking falsehoods is reprobated (*Surah 51:10*) while the tenth commandment is repeated in similar terminology:

And do not covet those things which Allah has graciously bestowed on some of you more than on others, to men is given what they earn and to women what they earn. But ask of Allah from his goodness, for Allah has full knowledge of all things. *Surah 4:32*

In Muslim society today the *shari'ah* is generally taken to cover actual actions and prescribed rituals covering every aspect of a Muslim's behaviour. It means more than just obedience to revealed laws and comprises a standard of ethics canvassing the whole of the religious, social, political and domestic life of its adherents. Nonetheless it remains concerned primarily with outward forms and prescriptions only. The word *adab*, for example, is more commonly used to define the finer details of ethics and courtesies between Muslims and their co-religionists such as the need to always greet a fellow believer with the words *salamu-`alaykum*, "peace be upon you", and to respond in kind (*Surah 4:54*). It also covers the etiquette to be followed when dealing with non-Muslims.

An important distinction in Islam is made between things sacred or prohibited and those which are common and lawful. The former are known as *haram*, meaning "set apart" and the word can be used for things out of bounds both in the sacred and vulgar sense. For example the holy mosque of Mecca is known as *masjid al-haram* (the "sacred mosque"), the word here being used in a positive sense, while the flesh of swine, on the other hand, is forbidden as *haram* because it is unclean. All lawful meats are *halaal*, the word meaning "loosed", once the *bismillah* has been pronounced over them and other products such as dairy produce are likewise *halaal* once it is proved that they contain no forbidden fats or other substances.

Well-known to most people are violent prescribed punishments in Islam. A number of Islamic countries have reimposed these in recent years while Saudi Arabia has enforced them strictly for many centuries. They are known as *hudud* ("limits"), the penal laws of Islam. The penalty for theft, *sarqa*, is the amputation of a hand and is prescribed in the Qur'an:

As for the thief, whether male or female, cut off their hands as an exemplary punishment from Allah for their transgression; for Allah is the Mighty, the Wise. *Surah 5:41*

In the Hadith, however, this sentence is said only to be applied in extreme cases where the thief has stolen something of real value:

Aisha reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: The hand of a thief should not be cut off but for a quarter of a dinar and upwards. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.907).

Other traditions say that a hand is not to be cut off where plants or fruit are stolen, where slaves steal their master's property (because the slave and all that he has remain the master's property) or where the value of the item stolen is of no real commercial value. Nonetheless the rigid enforcement of this prescription in Muhammad's own lifetime and the merciless nature of the execution of such punishments is well stated in the following record of a specific incident:

A thief was brought to the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) and his hand was cut off. Thereafter he commanded for it, and it was hung on his neck. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1230).

Although adulterers are often stoned to death in Muslim lands or are beheaded (as in Arabia), the Qur'an only prescribes a hundred lashes for the offence (*Surah 24:2*). Muslim jurists have generally taught that this only applies to unmarrieds who cohabit unlawfully with married persons and that the latter are to be executed in terms of numerous examples from the Hadith records where this penalty was applied during Muhammad's own lifetime.

SPECIFIC LAWS RELATING TO HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The Qur'an has laws and recommendations covering numerous aspects of relationships between Muslims in both Islamic societies and those where Muslims are in the minority. The *ummah* ("community") is the prevailing factor, namely the welfare of the Muslim society as a whole. The responsibility of a Muslim is towards his fellow-believer first and only thereafter to the prevailing order. This explains why Muslims, when in the minority, often tend to congregate together and form their own groups and organisations even though similar societies exist around them for all the inhabitants of any area. The last Shah of Iran during his reign did all he could to persuade his people to see themselves as Persians first and as Muslims second. When the Ayatollah Khomeini came to power, however, his attitude was that they were all Muslims first and nothing second. Although many Muslims in the West do contribute to the general welfare of the whole community and take part in the affairs of society around them it is nonetheless the rule that they form tightly-knit communities of their own to protect their own Islamic identity.

Human relationships are generally viewed from a practical rather than an idealistically sacred point of view. Thus marriage, *nikah*, is not regarded as a sacrament in Islam which should never be broken but rather as a contract between two parties which, where appropriate, may be dissolved by divorce. This is regarded as a necessary evil, however, and not as an option freely available to Muslims. The Qur'an calls marriage a *mithaq*, a "covenant" (*Surah 4:21*). It follows the Bible in forbidding marriages between persons within very close degrees of relationship (*Surah 4:23*) and it likewise makes the husband the head of the family, requiring the wife to submit to him and care for the common household. Muslim women are only permitted to marry Muslim men but the latter are allowed in the Qur'an to take wives from among the Jews and Christians:

The food of the People of the Scripture is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them. (Lawful in marriage) are chaste women who are believers as well as chaste women among the People of the Scripture. *Surah 5:6*

Although such wives should not be compelled to abandon their faith for Islam a tradition in Islam scorns the idea that a Muslim should take to wife a Christian woman who does not renounce her beliefs:

Narrated Nafi: Whenever Ibn Umar was asked about marrying a Christian lady or a Jewess, he would say: "Allah has made it unlawful for the believers to marry ladies who ascribe partners in worship to Allah, and I do not know of a greater thing, as regards ascribing partners in worship, etc., to Allah, than that a lady should say that Jesus is her Lord although he is just one of Allah's slaves". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.7, p.155).

It is well-known that the Qur'an permits polygamy but only between a man and his wives. No woman in Islam is allowed to have more than one husband at a time. Husbands are allowed to have up to four wives but, if they fear they cannot deal equitably with them, then they are to take only one at a time (*Surah 4:3*). At the time of a marriage the husband should give his wife a dowry as a free gift, but if the wife voluntarily chooses to forego it or returns any part of it to him, he should respond positively and cheerfully (*Surah 4:4*). Although Islam is often charged with making women subordinate and inferior to men the Qur'an regularly pays them special attention. Women are indeed seen to be the weaker sex who are to be submissive to their menfolk but the book constantly commands them to care for their wives. If the wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part and he agrees to separate, there is no blame on them if they should arrange an amicable settlement between themselves – an instance in the Qur'an where the wife is entitled to initiate the possibility of a divorce (*Surah 4:128*).

Men are warned that they will never be able to be entirely fair and just with women no matter how much they may try to be. They are never to desert a woman to leave her, so to speak, hanging in the air. A friendly understanding coupled with self-restraint is far better (*Surah 4:129*). Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, nevertheless if they fear that their wives have been disloyal or guilty of misconduct, they are entitled to admonish them and, if they do not repent, to refuse to share their beds and, as a last resort, to beat them (*Surah 4:34*).

These are but a sample of typical Qur'anic laws and injunctions covering one aspect of human relationships, namely marriage. Similar laws and recommendations cover issues such as divorce, cleanliness and the like. The awareness of Allah's watchful eye is an underlying theme in all areas of human conduct. Although specific injunctions and laws often cover the daily affairs of life much of the Qur'an's teaching is given by way of advice and in the promotion of principles which make for proper living. Its intention is to give beneficial guidance rather than to forcefully regulate every facet of a man's life. Human beings were never made to be slaves of tradition but rather living creatures entitled to live their own lives as they choose subject to certain obvious restraints and principles of conduct. (This is not true of the Hadith literature, however, which contains numerous traditions prescribing rules and observances affecting virtually every aspect of a believer's life).

Chapter Three

The Mind and Spirit of the Book of Allah

1. ALLAH – THE CENTRAL THEME OF THE QUR'AN

THE FOCAL POINT: "THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH"

If it were to be asked what convicted Muhammad more than anything else that he was called to be the last of God's prophets it could be said that his initial visions on Mount Hira were sufficient to persuade him that everything that "came" to him thereafter, whether by exoteric experience or inner inspiration, had a supernatural and therefore divine origin. It could also be said, however, that his conscience became satisfied as to one great overriding truth, namely the absolute unity of Allah the Supreme Being of the universe. He obviously felt

assured that, as long as he had this truth as the focal point and core of his message, he was divinely commissioned to guide his erring countrymen.

It can safely be said that this proclamation, *La ilaha illallah* – "There is no god but Allah", is the pivotal text of the Qur'an around which everything else rotates. The expression occurs in various forms no less than twenty-seven times (*Surah 73:9, etc*) and it forms the first part of the fundamental Islamic creed "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah". The greater part of the Qur'an emphasises this fact in opposition to pagan Arab idolatry and the errors of the People of the Scripture who were inclined to associate partners with him. The name *Allah* itself occurs nearly three thousand times in the book.

The name itself has no gender but Allah is always spoken of in the masculine form. *Huwallahullathii laa ilaaha illa huwa* – "He is Allah and there is no god except him" (*Surah 59:22*) both begins and ends with the masculine pronoun *huwa*. Just as the man is head over the woman, so God is head over the human race and, being a personal being and not a neutral spirit, he is described in the male gender in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Allah often speaks in the plural "We" (the pronoun in the Qur'an is *nahnu* and is commonly used as in *Surah 56:73*) and this appears to be a means of asserting his sovereign control over the universe, what is commonly called the "royal we" used by English monarchs when expressing their authority (as in Queen Victoria's famous cliché "We are not amused").

Many scholars have commented, however, on the extent to which Allah is spoken of in the third person in the Qur'an. Some have argued that it is strange, if Allah is the sole author of the Qur'an, to find him so regularly speaking independently of himself. On the other hand, as the book comes as a message for the world through the medium of an angelic messenger, it would be somewhat surprising if the text took on the form of a private, intimate communication between the Prophet and his Lord.

Nonetheless the Qur'an constantly urges Muhammad to hold fast to Allah as the sole source of his life and expectation for the future. He is told exactly what to declare to pagan unbelievers around him in verses that symbolise the overwhelming sense of Allah's being and lordship throughout the Qur'an:

Say: "I call only on my Lord and I do not associate anyone with Him". Say: "I have no power over you either for harm or for well-being". Say: "No one can protect me from Allah nor shall I find any refuge apart from Him. (I have no alternative) but to declare what comes from Allah and His Messages". *Surah 72:20-23*

"Lord of East and West! There is no god but He!" is the emphatic declaration and central theme of the Qur'an. It is very interesting to see that his existence is taken for granted and in no need of proof. The summons is to recognition of his lordship and to the worship of his glory. At the time, of course, atheism was generally unknown. Unbelievers are not reproached for disbelieving in Allah completely but for turning away from him to worship other gods or for associating other beings with him. Hence the declaration that there is no *other* god but He. The Qur'an does not consider the charge that there is no God at all. The issue is solely with possible rivals and the implications of polytheism:

If there were in the heavens and earth other gods beside Allah there would have been chaos! Glory be to Allah, Lord of the Throne, above what they attribute (to Him)! *Surah 21:23*

As Allah is invisible proof of his existence cannot be an issue. No one can obtain sight of his being or personal knowledge of his reality. The response has to be one of faith in what he has revealed. The important thing is to get into a right relationship with him by obeying his laws and living as a true Muslim should. The confession of Allah is seen, in the Qur'an, to be central to being human at all. The destiny of those who refuse to acknowledge him is too horrific to contemplate.

A very significant and recurring phrase in the Qur'an which puts the folly of ignoring Allah into sharp focus is *min dunillahi* – "apart from Allah" or "to the exclusion of Allah". The thought is abhorrent! Yet it can occur so easily in the hearts of men not only from deliberate rejection of his authority but even casual neglect of his ways. Simply acting or thinking with a lack of awareness of Allah will take a man away from Him, hence the constant warning in the Qur'an to maintain the Remembrance (*Dhikr*) of Allah at all times (*Surah 57:16*).

The words most commonly used in the Qur'an to stress the need to always acknowledge Allah are *wali* and *nasir*. These two words have similar meanings and they emphasise the fact that he is the only protector and patron in the universe. They can also be translated as guardian, sponsor, helper and guarantor. They occur alongside the expression *min dunillahi* in the following verse:

Nor will you find, apart from Allah, any protector or helper. *Surah 4:123*

Although life may appear to carry on as normal it is absolute foolishness for anyone to think he can prosper or gain Paradise if he should live "apart from Allah". The pagan idolater endangers himself by losing his favour with Allah in a confusion of other deities, the casual unbeliever by trusting in his own pride and self-sufficiency.

THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF ALLAH IN THE QUR'AN

While the Qur'an unrelentingly emphasises the oneness and all-sufficiency of Allah, it surprisingly has very little to say about his personality or character. Unlike the Bible, where the very heart of God shines forth again and again in his dealings with his people, Allah appears to have no heart as such. Empathy or feeling are never even remotely attributed to him. The accent invariably falls on his supreme control of all things, his sovereign authority over mankind, his power to bless or curse, to judge or forgive, to benefit or impoverish as he pleases. He is seen to be the Lord of all the worlds in need of no sustenance, assistance or protection from anyone. He is not accountable to anyone for any of his actions. The obligation is squarely on the shoulders of those he has created to seek his favour – they cannot appeal to anything in his own nature in argument against him (as many Biblical prophets successfully did such as Moses in reminding him of his promises to Abraham and turning his wrath away from the People of Israel when he sought to destroy them).

As a result many scholars of Islam in past centuries, when seeking to define the character of Allah, invariably concentrated on what he is *not*. Abu'l Hasan `Ali Al-Ash`ari, the famous theologian born in Basra in the third century after Muhammad's death, gave a very negative description of Allah in his *Makalat al-Islamiyin*. He said he had no body, nor object, nor volume. No place could encompass him, no time could pass by him. Nothing that could be said of any of his creatures could be used to describe him. Nothing, either, that could be imagined in the mind or be conceived by fantasy resembles him. Eyes cannot see him, harm cannot touch him, nor can joy or pleasure reach him. Nothing moves him. Another early Muslim scholar perhaps summed up the Muslim position in saying that, whatever you might conceive Allah to be, he is not that!

What, then, can be said positively about Allah? The Qur'an speaks of a number of facets of his being, said by Muslims to number ninety-nine in all, which define his character and what men can expect from him. Thirteen of these are mentioned in the following passage and, in the list and catalogue of Allah's ninety-nine names, these occur first in the order in which they here appear:

He is Allah and there is no god besides Him. Knower of all things whether concealed or apparent. He is the Compassionate (*ar-Rahman*), the Merciful (*ar-Rahim*). He is Allah and there is no god besides Him: the Sovereign (*al-Malik*), the Holy (*al-Quddus*), the Peaceful (*as-Salaam*), the Faithful (*al-Mu`min*), the Protector (*al-Muhaymin*), the Mighty (*al-Aziz*), the Proud (*al-Jabbar*), the Supreme (*al-Mutakabbir*). Glory be to Allah above what is associated (with him)! He is Allah, the Creator (*al-Khaliq*), the Maker (*al-Bari`*), the Designer (*al-Musawwir*). To Him belong the most beautiful names (*al-asmaa` al-husnaa*). *Surah 59:22-24*

All these names, however, are not regarded as facets of Allah's own personal being. In fact some Muslim scholars have believed and taught that they are purely attributes and that Allah could, if he wished, simply revoke them. They are said to be traits which govern his relationship and dealings with his creation and do not indicate any particular virtue in his own being or character.

The famous theologian Abu Hamid at-Tusi al-Ghazzali, who lived in the fifth century after Muhammad, wrote a book on the ninety-nine names of Allah which he titled *al-Maqsad al-Asna*. Speaking of the Qur'anic title *al-Wadud* ("the Loving One") which appears twice in the book (*Surah 11:90, 85:14*), he states that while it is Allah's intention to do good towards mankind and be compassionate, he himself remains above the feeling of love. His "love" must be determined solely as his purpose to approve of and show favour towards those who

seek him. He is above the empathy associated with human compassion, thus his love and mercy are desired in respect of their objects only for their own prosperity and benefit and not because of any sympathy or emotion.

In conclusion one is left with a somewhat static concept of God in Islam. It would be an honour to him to say that, even though he might be moved deep within his spirit with feeling and heartfelt emotion at any time, he could be relied on always to act consistently with his own perfect character. The Allah of the Qur'an, however, is unchanging simply because he has no character as such. He is what he is. The correctness of the human attitude to him comes purely in acknowledging him rather than in knowing him personally. His absolute unity and distinctness from all that he has created keep him aloof from the universe – an almost lonely God in need of no one's company. From this concept comes the Muslim's response to Allah and his attitude towards himself – born to be a servant under obligation to conform to codes of conduct and patterns of religious worship prescribed by his Creator who has the right to do as he pleases, whose actions he may not question, and to whom he will give account of his life.

2. MEN AND WOMEN AS THE SERVANTS OF ALLAH

THE WHOLE CREATION FORMED SOLELY FOR ALLAH'S SERVICE

The dominion of Allah over all things leads, perforce, to the dogma that the universe and everything in it was created solely for his service. Unlike the Christian faith, where God's love for mankind led him in the person of Jesus Christ to taking the role of a servant to redeem a vast number of men and women with the assurance that they in time would become the children of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, Islam sees their role solely as the servants of God who can never hope to share his glory. Allah's prerogative to do as he chooses at all times forbids any personal association with men and women with whom he might otherwise be bound to fulfil his own obligations pursuant to any covenant he might have made with them. Allah's self-sufficiency and mankind's dependence on him and its commitment to his service is summed up in these words:

I have not created jinn and mankind except to serve me. I require no sustenance from them nor do I desire that they should feed me. For Allah is He who is the Provider, All-Powerful, the Steadfast. *Surah 51:56*

Even the angels are called *`ibaadun-Rahmaan*, "servants of the Compassionate", in the Qur'an (*Surah 43:19*). There is an unbridgeable gap between Allah and all that he has created. No personal or intimate relationship between them is possible. The function of every creature in the universe is summed up in this emphatic declaration:

For every (creature) that is in the heavens and the earth cannot come to the Compassionate except as a servant. *Surah 19:93*

Hence the very title of the Muslim faith, *Islam* – "Submission", whereby all true believers bow in service to their Master above the heavens. Not that Allah has no real interest in what happens to men and women, nor can he be said to be indifferent towards them. In the Qur'an as much attention is given to mankind as to Allah himself. Man's nature, behaviour, psychology, his duties and ultimate destiny are as much the concern of the book as the sovereignty of Allah himself. The salvation of human beings is one of the most important themes in the book and, as the Qur'an emphasises again and again, it would not have been sent down had Allah's intention been otherwise. The fate of mankind is set out in the Qur'an not as something to be determined by Allah's whims or fancies but as the supreme purpose of Allah's decrees which he will not change.

Nonetheless, as Allah is seen to be the Lord of his servants rather than as, in the Christian Bible, the Father of his children, his role in the relationship between God and man is to assert his majesty and power. The true *`abd* (servant) of Allah is therefore to be concerned primarily with virtues pertaining to submissive service. Humility, modesty, unquestioning obedience and conformity to prescribed forms of worship are therefore seen to be the most prominent characteristics of a man of God rather than, as in Christianity, love, joy, selflessness, longsuffering and a forgiving disposition. A true Muslim pays careful attention to the revealed will of Allah,

seeking to obey his commands without so much as a murmur. The lordship of Allah and the call to service is again emphasised here:

Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them! So serve Him (*fa`abudh`*) and be patient in His service (*`ibada*) – do you know of any (who can be) named with him? *Surah 19:65*

In the Qur'an it is not surprising, therefore, to find so much importance being attached to terms like *ta`ah*, "obedience"; *qunut*, "humbleness"; *khushu`*, "submissiveness" and *tadarru`*, "self-abasement". These all stand in contrast to a stubborn refusal to obey Allah's revelations which is logically seen to be the evidence of a hardened heart and the spirit of a man who will not be a servant of Allah. The Qur'an particularly deals with this as the pervading mood of the times of *Jahiliyyah*, the "Times of Ignorance" before Islam, and as the reason for the rejection of the Qur'anic revelation by the unbelievers of Muhammad's day.

Confidence in human power, ability or inventiveness are seen as typical of the spirit that prevents a man becoming an *`abd* of Allah, so likewise the determination not to acknowledge authority or to assert self-independence. Indeed these were the very traits of the pre-Islamic Arabian character. The Qur'an speaks of an occasion where the unbelievers fiercely opposed Muhammad and became hot-tempered. The word used in the text to describe this is *hamiyyah* which means a burning determination to defend one's position. The Qur'an specifically calls it the *hamiyyatal-jahiliyyah*, the fiery opposition typical of that characterising the times of ignorance before Islam. In contrast, however, Allah sent down his peace and tranquillity to his Apostle and to the believers. The word used to contrast the two spirits is *sakinah*, similar in meaning to the Hebrew *shechinah* (*Surah 48:26*). The glory of Allah is his own sense of being at peace with himself and it is this spirit which should characterise those who are truly his servants.

Pre-Islamic Arabs were proudly attached to their tribes and would avenge anyone offended or injured by the member of another tribe no matter what the cause (whether justified or not). They would also refuse to accept anything that undermined their sense of self-dignity and would fiercely react to anyone who humiliated them in any way. This was the core of Arab haughtiness prior to Islam. `Abid ibn al-Abras, a poet from those times, wrote in his *Diwan* (Vol.40, v.20): "We refuse resolutely to submit to another's direction, whoever he may be! On the contrary we make all men obey our directions and that without bit and bridle". It was this arrogant spirit that Muhammad saw as the cause of opposition to his message, the unwillingness to humbly submit and to become the servant of another, in this case Allah himself.

Jews and Christians are not charged generally with the same pride of unbelief but they are reproached for believing themselves to be the sons of Allah and his beloved children. If so, why does Allah punish them for their sins? No indeed, they are only men, men among the whole of mankind whom Allah created to be his servants. For to Allah alone belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth (*Surah 5:20*). This constant theme is applied to Jesus Christ himself in the Qur'an:

The Messiah does not disdain to be a servant of Allah, nor the angels who are nearest (to him). *Surah 4:172*

In another verse the Qur'an, speaking of Jesus, bluntly declares *in huwa illa `abd* – "he was no more than a servant" (*Surah 43:59*). It is very interesting to find a narrative in the Qur'an where Jesus himself is said to have proclaimed *inni `abdullah* – "I am a servant of Allah" (*Surah 19:30*). The passage states that, when he was born, Mary's kinsfolk charged her with having a child out of wedlock and, after she had pointed to the baby Jesus in the cradle, he made an oration beginning with this declaration. The incident has no parallel in the Bible but does have one in an old apocryphal Gospel known, significantly, only from an Arabic text. It is known as *The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy* and its author is unknown. The story of Jesus speaking from the cradle is repeated at the beginning of the book, except that here he is recorded as saying to his mother Mary *`inni huwa Yasu` ibnullah*, "I am Jesus the Son of God", going on to declare that he is that Word, which he sent, which the Angel Gabriel had announced to her, and that his Father had sent him as a blessing to the nations. The whole story appears to be an apocryphal adaptation of a similar story in Buddhism where Buddha himself is said to have spoken to his mother while an infant, but significantly the Qur'an, maintaining consistency with its own teaching that the Messiah was only a servant of Allah, has changed the original statement attributed to Jesus that he is the Son of God.

ALLAH'S SOVEREIGN CONTROL OVER HIS SERVANTS

Muhammad, likewise, is no more than a servant of Allah, but this designation is one of honour ("Our servant" – *Surah 2:23*) signifying one who is in harmony with Allah's purposes and obedient to his will. All true believers are likewise regarded as honourable servants. In a chapter given to repeating the major incidents in some of the lives of the former prophets, they are called *`ibaadallahil-mukhlasiin*, "the devoted servants of Allah" on five occasions (*Surah 37:160, 169 etc*) and *`ibaadinal-mu`miniin*, "Our believing servants" on four occasions. There is no sense of being in bondage to servitude in the Qur'an, rather the concept is one of a harmonious and peaceful relationship where Allah and the believers are on the same wavelength as they humbly bow to his commands.

Allah is accordingly constantly said to be gentle with his servants (*Surah 2:207*), that he always looks upon them and sees their actions and trials at all times (*Surah 3:15*), that he is never unjust towards them (*Surah 3:182*), but that he remains at all times omnipotent over them (*Surah 6:18*). It is this last facet of the relationship, however, that brings back into focus the fact that Allah ultimately has no responsibility towards anyone and cannot be held accountable by anyone, even if he be a believer or one of his prophets. They remain, simply, his servants and no more.

Therefore, even among the believers, Allah nonetheless distributes his gifts and favours as he chooses and no one can question why one should be preferred above another. No one can ask why, for example, he should have chosen to show his favours to the Children of Israel in times past when he sent them the Prophethood and the Scripture, but does so no longer. It is all according to his own power and command alone.

Exalted above the ranks is the Possessor of the Throne. He sends the Spirit from His Command (*`amr*) upon those of his servants whom he pleases that he may warn them of the Day of Reckoning. *Surah 40:15*

Allah's dominion over his servants gives him the right to benefit whomever he wills (*Surah 7:128*) and bestow special guidance likewise on anyone of his own choice as he pleases (*Surah 6:88*). No one can question his acts – whether it is pain or pleasure, it is as he wills (*Surah 10:107*). He enlarges or restricts according to his own discretion (*Surah 28:82*). This total supremacy over all his own people has led at times to a somewhat fatalistic attitude among Muslims. Whatever happens, whether for good or evil, is according to his will. If no one can resist it, why strive for one's own advancement at all? Simply take what comes for it will surely come just as he purposes. This attitude pervades the mentality of many Muslims.

It is not surprising, therefore, to find traditions in the Hadith literature describing incidents at the beginning of creation where Allah is seen to be predetermining all human actions and the destiny of all men according to his purposes before they even come into existence. One such narrative reads:

`Umar b. al-Khattab reported: I heard that the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) was questioned and he replied: The Lord created Adam, then moved His right hand on his back and brought out issues and said: We have created them for Heaven: these will do actions befitting heavenly persons. Then He moved His left hand on his back and brought out issues and said: We have created them for Hell and these will do actions befitting Hell. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.374).

The Qur'an itself supports the concept that those who are guided on the right path are only on it because of Allah's predetermined decree that they should be, and that those who go astray do so because Allah has expressly left them to do so. Yet for such there will be no Protector besides Allah and they will be thrown into the fierceness of hellfire because they rejected his signs and disbelieved in the resurrection as they were destined to do (*Surah 17:97-98*). It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find Muslims expressing a fatalistic view of life and their destiny. Another tradition has a very interesting story about the beginning of creation in that it appears to exonerate Adam from his transgression according to the principle that he was only doing what he was predestined to do:

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: There was an argument between Adam and Moses. Moses said: Are you that Adam whose lapse caused you to get out of Paradise? Adam said to him: Are you that Moses whom Allah selected for his Messengership, for His conversation, and you blame me

for an affair which had been ordained for me before I was created? This is how Adam came the better of Moses. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1396).

The Qur'an declares that it is indeed a message to all the worlds and to whoever wishes to go straight, but no one shall unless Allah, the Lord of the worlds, so wills (*Surah 81:27-29*). Therefore, although there may be a felicitous relationship between Allah and his servants, they are only so because he has chosen to draw them into his path and he therefore is entitled to remain in total control over them, dealing with them as he wishes. This is the heart of the mind and spirit of a Muslim, very different from the Christian knowledge of God the Father who, in his love for those whom he has called to be his own children, will never deal capriciously with them but will bring them safely into his kingdom and glory.

3. THE REBELLIOUS SPIRIT PERVADING MANKIND

MANKIND CREATED FOR TROUBLE AND ANXIETY

The Qur'an does not teach a doctrine of original sin as the Bible does but it does nevertheless teach that the majority of mankind lives in enmity towards God. It gives a forthright indictment of the human race generally in the following passage:

Verily we have created mankind for trouble. Does he think that no one has power over him? When he says "I have consumed an abundance of wealth" does he think no one sees him? Have We not given him two eyes, a tongue and two lips and shown him the two highways? But he has not hastened to the steep (path). *Surah 90:4-11*

At the same time the Qur'an teaches that Allah has been gracious towards the nations, revealing to them his *ayat* ("signs") and sending to them his prophets and messengers. He would find a people depressed in suffering and adversity but would lift them up so that they might learn humility. Their suffering would be changed into prosperity and, if only they had believed in him and feared him, all kinds of blessings in heaven and earth would have been showered upon them. Nonetheless they continued to reject his truths so that he had to call them to account for their misdeeds (*Surah 7:94-96*).

The only correct response to Allah's grace is declared to be a spirit of *shukr*, an attitude of "thankfulness" or gratitude towards him. In the Qur'an *iman* (faith) and *shukr* are often almost synonymous terms. The opposite is *kufr*, "unbelief" or "ingratitude". Yet it is this very spirit of ungratefulness that pervades human thinking and so the Qur'an says:

Verily man is ungrateful to his Lord. And to that he bears witness and passionate is his love of indulgence. *Surah 100:6-8*

The only hope for rebellious men is to repent and to ask forgiveness of Allah. Even though they be the nearest relatives of those who are believers, if they persist in ingratitude and unbelief forgiveness will be forbidden to them (*Surah 9:113*). Were Muhammad himself to ask forgiveness for them up to seventy times, Allah will not forgive them because they have rejected him – and Allah does not guide those who are perversely rebellious (*Surah 9:80*). Worst of all is the attitude of all unbelievers that they possess an *istaghna*, a "self-sufficiency" apart from Allah. Such a stance is the ultimate in perversity (*Surah 96:6-7*).

Much attention is given in the Qur'an to this spirit of general unbelief and hard-heartedness in the hearts of most men towards Allah. Only those who have faith and do righteous deeds, holding patiently to the truth, are excepted from the blunt declaration that "Indeed man is in ruin" (*Surah 103:3*). Although the Qur'an does not teach, as the Bible does, that men by nature are in bondage to sin and wickedness and cannot save their own souls without the grace of God, it does confirm a universal tendency in the human race towards ungodliness and wrongdoing. It comes very close to the Biblical theme in the following verse:

I do not claim that my soul is innocent for man is prone to evil. *Surah 12:53*

In another passage the Qur'an exposes the human inclination towards fretfulness when dependence on Allah is overlooked and men are left entirely to their own devices:

Verily man was created anxious, fretful when evil touches him but mean-spirited when good reaches him. *Surah 70:19-21*

One of the commonest words in the Qur'an describing the essence of all transgression towards Allah is *dhulm* meaning "wrong". False-worship is said to be the greatest wrongdoing of all (*Surah 31:14*). The word is used mainly in the context of wrongs done by men towards their fellow human beings such as injustice, deceit, fraud and the like. On numerous occasions it is said that in so behaving men commit *dhulm al-nafs*, that is, they harm their own souls (*Surah 2:57*). On the other hand no one can ever accuse Allah of *dhulm* in his dealings with mankind. Only strict justice tempers every decree of Allah towards his creatures. The wrongdoing that men do brings its own misfortunes upon them and when they suffer because of their folly it is because of the deeds their own hands have brought forth. For indeed Allah does no wrong (*dhulm*) towards his servants (*Surah 22:10*). The Qur'an, at times, attributes this spirit of wrongdoing not only to men individually but also to nations and even to social ideologies and structures. Nonetheless such wrongdoing is not seen as an affront to the glory of Allah but rather as a false course likely to cause those who follow it severe damage and injury. The theme here remains the same, however, namely that the tendency towards wrongdoing is prevalent among men and is the course most of them will pursue.

A SICKNESS IN THE HEARTS OF THE HYPOCRITES

Apart from the perversity of unbelievers generally the Qur'an singles out one group in particular as being guilty of far more than simple wrongdoing. These are the *munaḥiqun*, the "hypocrites" who feign belief in Allah or allegiance to the community of believers while their hearts are far from them. Such people were regarded by Muhammad as particularly detestable. A group of them in Medina outwardly professed allegiance to his cause when he first became the leader of the people there but, again and again, proved to be entirely undependable and, at worst, secretly hostile towards the believers. Their leader was one `Abdullah ibn Ubayy who at times took sides with Muhammad but at others deserted him with his own followers. This happened just before the famous Battle of Uhud and the depletion of the Muslim ranks led partly to their defeat. About one-third of the army Muhammad had assembled deserted him just before the conflict and returned to Medina when it was apparent that the Muslims intended to fight the battle outside the city. `Abdullah's followers preferred to defend their homes near the city.

Nonetheless the Qur'an sees this inclination towards double-mindedness as something far more than disloyalty towards the Muslim community. It is a malady in the very mentality of those who have it. On no less than thirteen occasions the book links the *munaḥiqun* ("hypocrites") with "those in whose hearts is a disease". The *maradh* is a "sickness" in their hearts which makes them attempt to mislead believers (*Surah 8:49*). The constant use of the two expressions side-by-side suggests that they are intended to be synonymous. It would probably be most appropriate to say that Muhammad was nauseated by them and their fickleness. He obviously regarded them as a dangerous group whose loyalty was likely to turn to hostility at any time.

While *dhulm* covers all kinds of wrongdoing, whether social, moral or religious, *nifaq* ("hypocrisy") is seen to be solely in the religious realm. As Muhammad saw himself not only as the political leader in Medina but also as the Prophet of Allah to the nations it is perhaps not surprising that he viewed their inconstancy first and foremost as a challenge to the sincerity of his prophetic convictions. It also explains why he saw them as possessed of a sickness in their hearts. The Qur'an regards them as worse than unbelievers, much in the same way as Jesus regarded the religious Pharisees of his own day. It defines them as follows:

The hypocrites seek to outwit Allah but he will outwit them. When they stand up to pray, they stand listlessly, to be seen of men but holding Allah little in remembrance. (They are) distracted all the time, given to neither one nor the other. For those whom Allah leads astray you will not find a way. *Surah 4:142*

Their casual indifference is seen to be their undoing. The Biblical rebuke for being neither cold nor hot but generally lukewarm (*Revelation 3:16*) seems to have a parallel here. They are not seen to be halfhearted believers but the worst of Allah's enemies whose eternal destiny has already been sealed and determined:

Indeed the hypocrites are the rebellious (ones). And Allah has promised the hypocrites, both men and women, and unbelievers the Fire of Hell therein to dwell. It is sufficient for them. Allah has cursed them and there awaits them a lasting chastisement. *Surah 9:67-68*

Not only are they boldly reprobated but it is also said that they will be thrown into the deepest parts of the Fire (*Surah 4:145*). A brief analysis of some of the specific occasions of their opposition to Muhammad during his last ten years at Medina will show why he detested them so much and regarded them as worse than unbelievers. One passage says of them:

They are those who believe and then disbelieve. Then they believe (again), then they disbelieve (again), then they increase their disbelief. Allah will neither forgive them nor guide them on the way. Announce to the hypocrites that there is for them a grievous penalty. *Surah 4:137-138*

At times it appears that they would publicly acknowledge that Muhammad was sent as the Messenger of Allah while in their hearts they wished it were otherwise. They might take oaths to convince the Muslims that they were sincere but this was only to give them an opportunity to obstruct others from the path of Allah (*Surah 63:1-2*). In a typically derogatory passage Muhammad is instructed about them as follows:

When you look at them their bodies please you and when they speak you listen to their words. They are like propped-up timbers. They think every cry is against them. They are the enemy – so beware of them. Allah curses them! How they are deluded! *Surah 63:4*

The same chapter makes a brief reference to an incident where they went out with Muhammad in an expedition against the Banu Mustaliq. `Abdullah ibn Ubayy then suggested that if they were to return to the city (Medina) they, the "more honourable" group, would expel "the meaner" group, namely the Prophet and his followers who had come up from Mecca. The Qur'an, however, states that true honour belongs to Allah alone even though they know it not (*Surah 63:8*).

In another passage the hypocrites and, again, "those in whose hearts is a sickness", are rebuked for deliberately stirring up sedition in the city (*Surah 33:60*) while on another occasion they are upbraided for falsely making promises to the Jews around the city that they would stand by them if they were attacked or exiled (*Surah 59:11*). It is known that they proved to be totally unreliable when their help was really needed.

Mankind in general is not highly esteemed in the Qur'an. There is a rebellious spirit pervading the human race and only in a true repentance and turning to Allah as submissive Muslims is there a hope of forgiveness and acceptance with him.

4. FAITH IN THE HEART OF TRUE BELIEVERS

THE CHARACTER OF BELIEVERS IN THE QUR'AN

One of the commonest words in the Qur'an is *amana* meaning "to believe". More than anything else true Muslims are characterised by this one prime virtue, namely to believe in Allah and his will as revealed in the book. One of the names of Allah himself in the Qur'an is *Al-Mu`min*, "The Faithful One", the word coming from the same roots as *amana*. Again and again the address to the followers of Islam commences *Yaa ayyuhallathiina aamanuu*, "O you who believe!" A typical verse containing this injunction as well as a call to project the character of a true believer reads:

O you who believe! Bow down and prostrate yourselves and serve your Lord and do good so that you may prosper. *Surah 22:77*

The prevalence of idolatry throughout the Arabian Peninsula during the time of Muhammad led him to seeing the issue between true faith and falsehood being confined to one simple principle. Belief in Allah as the only true God, summed up in the fundamental testimony "There is no god but Allah", was regarded as the dividing line between a true Muslim and an unbeliever. He had trouble in the later years of his mission with the Jewish and Christian belief in God which was also monotheistic in emphasis, especially when they rejected him as the Apostle of Allah, as his whole vocation in Mecca had been built on the basic premise that he was the standard-bearer of Allah's truth against the falsehoods of the pagan Arabian idolaters. He solved the problem by eventually accusing the Jews and Christians of associating partners to Allah as well (*Surah 9:30*). To him Muslim faith had one exclusive character – true Muslim believers were committed to an exercise of faith in Allah alone. The following verse sums up the basic conviction very succinctly:

Say: He is the Compassionate. We believe in Him, and towards Him we put our trust. Soon you will know who is in manifest error. *Surah 67:29*

True belief naturally is not just an assent to the reality of Allah, it requires a heartfelt commitment to his will. It is only through genuine repentance, the Qur'an teaches, that believers can hope to ultimately be forgiven and admitted to Paradise (*Surah 66:8*). In another place the Qur'an declares that they are overflowing in their love for Allah (*Surah 2:165*). A true believer is therefore seen to be enthusiastically committed to his faith in Allah, it is the essential witness of his whole being. By this faith he can discern the reality of Allah in all things even when he uses similitudes of small things such as gnats and other tiny creatures of the earth. Those who believe recognise the truth from their Lord while the unbelievers are led astray into ignorance (*Surah 2:26*).

True believers are commanded to be consistent in their devotion to Allah, to obey him and his Apostle, to give response to them both when they are called to follow the path that leads to life. They are also commanded not to betray the trust of Allah and his Apostle nor to misuse what has been entrusted to them. Their possessions and offspring are but a trial to see whether their hearts are committed to Allah with whom lies their highest reward. As long as they fear Allah he will grant them a criterion (*furqan*) to distinguish good from evil (*Surah 8:20-29*). It is in the constancy of true faith that they will find true peace:

(It is to) those who believe and whose hearts are at rest in the remembrance of Allah, for it is in the remembrance of Allah that hearts find their leisure. *Surah 13:28*

The summons is constantly to an undivided loyalty towards Allah. The believers' profession of faith in him must not be distracted in any way by the setting of their affections on anything else apart from him such as their riches or their children. Anything that takes a man away from the remembrance of Allah will cause him one or other form of loss in the end (*Surah 63:9*). Indeed there is even a severe warning in the Qur'an that one's own wife and children may be the enemies of the believers – they are to beware of anything that might take them away from their faith (*Surah 64:14*). The good news which Allah sends them as long as they are faithful to him is the assurance that they are a liberated people with a very high rank before him (*Surah 10:2*).

The road of faith is furthermore seen to be one where many trials will come across the path of believers to test them. They should not lose heart for they must learn to master themselves and their trials if they are true in faith. If they are injured in any way they must remember that other believers before them have likewise been wounded and yet have kept their faith. Times of varying fortunes are sent to prove those that believe and so that Allah may himself find ranks of witnesses and martyrs for Islam (*Surah 3:139-140*). It is a hard path sent to try and prove those who truly believe in Allah and his Apostle:

Allah tries those who believe and purges unbelievers. Did you think you could enter Paradise without Allah knowing those who struggled and knowing the patient? *Surah 3:141-142*

Those who believe are elsewhere said to be those who also do deeds of righteousness, who establish regular prayers and charity. The mark of a true Muslim accordingly is one who believes in the oneness of Allah and fervently follows the path of faith before him.

There is more to true faith, however. Believers make up an *ummah*, a community of those who are submissive to Allah (*Surah 2:128*). They are said to be the best of peoples in the Qur'an (*Surah 3:110*). Mankind had originally been created as one single nation of peoples (*Surah 10:19*) and it was only the stubborn unbelief of most of them that led to the human race becoming a multitude of people hostile to God. The *ummah* of those who truly believe, however, though possibly made up of only a minority of the people who live on the earth, is also one *ummah*, a body of Muslims whose corporate devotion must be to Allah alone (*Surah 21:92*).

SEEKING OUT THE FACE OF ALLAH, THE GREAT UNSEEN ONE

The Qur'an takes the essence of true belief in Allah further than this, however. Not only is real faith seen in the exercise of good deeds and a general conformity to the will of Allah as revealed in his holy scripture but it has an element of a trust in something that is unseen. It is the hope of ultimately seeing his face that should inspire the faithful to remain steadfast on the road of faith.

There are two realms according to the Qur'an, the world of the unseen and invisible (*`alam al-ghayb*) and the world of what is visible and tangible (*`alam ash-shahadah*). Only the latter realm is at man's disposal but Allah reigns over them both. The invisible realm is his alone. From his standpoint there cannot be anything that is invisible for he sees and knows all things, but there are some things that he has hidden from his servants. It is a confession of genuine faith to acknowledge his right as Creator of all things to conceal some things though he is aware of them all:

Say, O Allah! Creator of the heavens and the earth! Knower of the Invisible and the Visible! *Surah 39:46*

It is a very common theme in the Qur'an. Allah himself is called *Al-Ghayb*, "The Unseen One" (*Surah 2:3*) and it is part of his majesty to keep himself hidden from his creatures. Muhammad himself was quite disturbed when unbelievers would not simply believe in the testimony of Allah through his preaching but demanded all kinds of proof of his existence and power. He was warned that they would charge him to declare the time of the final hour of judgment:

Men will ask you concerning the Hour. Say: The knowledge of that belongs to Allah alone. And what will make you ever understand? Perhaps the Hour is nigh! *Surah 33:63*

On another occasion they demanded to know when the punishment he was threatening them with for disbelieving in his preaching was coming. He had warned them that Allah would overthrow their city. He was told to respond to them as follows:

Say: "I do not know whether what you are threatened with is near or whether my Lord will appoint a longer term for it. He is the knower of the Unseen (*al-ghayb*) and to no one does he disclose what is concealed (*ghaybi*)." *Surah 72:25-26*

Another passage strongly emphasises this theme. How can the unbelievers say that there are gods beside Allah? He originated the creation and gives sustenance to all men from both heaven and earth. None in the heavens or on the earth knows the Unseen except Allah, nor can they perceive when they shall be called to judgment. Still less can their knowledge comprehend the hereafter (*Surah 27:64-66*).

Whenever Muhammad was challenged to bring forth a sign in proof of his mission he would revert to this premise. The Unseen belongs to Allah alone and he himself is hidden within its realm. To command him to prove himself is to arrogantly expect him to relinquish the order of the visible and invisible which he has decreed.

They say: "Why is not a sign sent down to him from his Lord?" Say: "The Unseen belongs to Allah. So wait! I too will wait with you!" *Surah 10:20*

Even believers cannot expect him to disclose what is concealed by his decree. He has promised that, as soon as the good has been separated from the evil, he will deliver the believers from their state, but he will not disclose to them the secrets of the Unseen (*Surah 3:179*). Those who believe without seeing are the blessed. As long as

they realise his presence as if they saw him they are men of genuine faith. They need only to purify themselves and to establish prayer to fulfil the will of their Lord though he remains unseen (*Surah 35:18*).

The goal of every believer is to seek to ultimately see the Face of Allah (*wajhullah*). Though unseen he stands face-to-face with his own and their spiritual well-being is best promoted by pursuing the knowledge of his will, though they see him not, as if they were standing directly in front of him. The principle is stated in this verse:

Allah sets on the right path whomever he pleases. Whatever good you give benefits your own souls, and you will only do so seeking the Face of Allah. Whatever good you give will be returned to you and you will not be dealt with unjustly. *Surah 2:272*

This same theme is repeated in another similar passage where the heart of true faith is again seen to be the putting away of everything else to seek the countenance of Allah. This is perceived to be the sure mark of a sincere believer:

Those who spend their wealth to increase their own purity and seek no favour from anyone expecting a reward in return, these are those who desire only the Face of their Lord Most High, and surely they will be satisfied. *Surah 92:18-21*

Although he is presently unseen while the universe stands fully apparent before mankind, at the end what is visible will be seen to have been transient while only his Face will remain (*Surah 28:88*). All true believers will then be satisfied with the sight of his glory and all else will be forgotten. The reality of Allah, the only true God, is once again seen to be central to all that the Qur'an teaches and true faith in the heart of a believer will lead him towards the awareness of Allah at all times. The final destiny is stated clearly in these words:

All that is on the earth will perish, but will abide the Face of your Lord, the Majestic, the Noble. *Surah 55:26-27*

If it should be asked what is meant by the "Face of Allah" the Qur'an defines it as the Splendour of his bounteous goodness in meeting the need of every creature in the heavens and the earth (*Surah 55:29*). It is also interpreted to be his whole countenance for, whichever direction a man may turn, there is the Face of Allah – for Allah is the All-Pervading, the All-Knowing (*Surah 2:115*).

Anyone seeking his reward with his Lord must perform the basic duty of a Muslim – to submit to the Face of Allah (*aslama wajhullah*) and to always do what is right and good (*Surah 2:112*). The expression is a very common one in the Qur'an (*Surah 30:38, etc*) and it is set forth as the prime aim of all who do not now see Allah but hope to see him face-to-face and to be accepted by him.

The character of a true believer is defined in the Qur'an in very clear terms. A true Muslim is one who believes in Allah alone, who seeks to do his will, who joins the body of believers, and who directs his face to the One who is presently Unseen but who is facing his servants in return. Such is said to be the only course that leads to the rewards and delights of Paradise while those who reject the knowledge of Allah, for whatever reason and in whatever manner, will be the losers on the Last Day.

Chapter Four

The Origins and Sources of the Qur'an

1. FOREIGN ELEMENTS IN THE QUR'AN TEXT

EXAMPLES OF NON-ARABIC WORDS IN THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an on numerous occasions proclaims that it has been sent down as an Arabic Qur'an (*Surah 12:2, 13:37, 42:7*) so that its teaching would be plain to those who heard it. Throughout the Muslim world the Arabic language is revered as the speech of the Book of Allah and all translations of the Qur'an into whatever language

are regarded as inferior to the Arabic original. Islamic legend goes so far as to declare that Arabic must be the language of heaven. Furthermore, because the book is said to have been revealed by Allah to Muhammad, it is presumed that it is a perfect Scripture dependent on nothing other than his omniscient will and knowledge. Nothing could have come from a human source or have been learnt by the Prophet from other backgrounds.

There are telling evidences, however, that much of the Qur'an has been derived from Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian and Buddhist origins. To begin with it seems appropriate to mention that numerous words in the book, some of which have become the most sacred of expressions to Muslims, are not of a truly Arabic origin but are derived from other languages. In a way this is to be expected as the Qur'an, being a text which declares its association with the Judeo-Christian prophetic heritage rather than the pagan idolatry of 7th-century Arabia, is likely to contain a number of words more familiar to foreigners than to Arabs.

The very word *qur'an*, which occurs some seventy times in the book and means "a recitation", is not derived from an original Arabic word. Indeed it is significant to note that there are only four occasions where a form of the word *qaraa`* is not used for the revelation of the Qur'an text to Muhammad. On one of these it refers to the reading of the Scripture that came before the Qur'an (*Surah 10:94*), on another to a book his opponents demanded he should send down to them which they could read (*Surah 17:93*) and on two others to books of fate which believers and unbelievers will be made to read on the Last Day (*Surah 17:71, 69:19*). It is clear that every use of the word is in a religious context, in particular with the reading of heavenly books.

The word *qaraa`* is not an original Arabic word with the simple meaning "to read". The verbal noun *qur'an* itself is not found in Arabic writings prior to the Qur'an itself and it must be presumed that the word, if not original to the book, is at least contemporary with it. The most probable origin of the word is the Syriac Christian word *qiryani* meaning the "reading" of a scripture lesson from a lectern in a Church. This is very much the sense in which the word is used in the Qur'an and there can be little doubt that it is derived from Christian sources.

Numerous other words and names in the Qur'an are derived from alien sources. Elijah is mentioned three times by name in the book, as *Ilyas* in *Surahs 6:85 and 37:123*, and as *Ilyasin* in *Surah 37:130*. The latter form was apparently used to rhyme his name with the last word of the next verse, *al-muhsiniin*. It is very interesting to note that the word has no connection with the original Hebrew name for the prophet but is the same as the Greek and Syriac translation of his name from which it is clearly derived. The same can be said for the prophet Jonah who is called *Yunus* four times in the Qur'an (*Surah 4:163, etc*). He is called *Yonah* in the original Hebrew and *Yunas* in the Greek Septuagint and New Testament. The Qur'anic form would appear to have been derived from the Syriac form which is exactly the same and is obtained originally from the Greek. Although Hebrew and Arabic are very similar semitic languages it is intriguing to find Qur'anic names for Hebrew prophets being derived from Greek and Syriac sources and not from the Hebrew originals.

There are numerous other similar instances of alien words being found in the "pure Arabic" Qur'an but these should suffice as an example of the presence of borrowed words and names in the book.

ALLAH, THE BALANCE AND JEWISH RABBIS IN THE QUR'AN

It may surprise Muslims to find that the name *Allah* is likewise derived from a foreign word. The common Arabic word for a "god" is *`ilah* but *Allah* is a unique term used a proper name for the Lord of the Universe. It has been suggested that it is a contraction of *al-`ilah*, "the god", an expression which does occur in some early Arabic texts. There is no evidence, however, that it was ever combined into a proper name. What is known for certain is that the name appears in other Arabic works such as the seven famous poems known as the *Mu`allaqat* composed shortly before Muhammad's time. It has a direct parallel in the Syriac *Alaha* from which its Arabic form is almost certainly derived. Being the name of the Christian God, a monotheistic being in contrast with the pagan Arabian deities, it is not surprising that it became Arabicised when the concept of one Supreme Being began to permeate Arabic belief just prior to Muhammad's emphasis on it to the exclusion of all other gods.

There are two words for a "balance" in the Qur'an, *mizan* and *qistas*. Both are mentioned on only a few occasions. The latter word *qistas* refers to a balance in the sense of a just and equitable measure which a merchant should give after weighing it honestly and correctly (*Surah 17:35*). It was recognised very early on by

Muslim commentators as a loan-word and one that is not of genuine Arabic origin. Scholars such as as-Suyuti, ath-Tha`alabi and as-Sijistani all regarded it as borrowed from Greek though its immediate origin is not easy to determine. It would seem that it is obtained from the very similar Aramaic or Syriac words for "a measure". That it has a foreign origin, however, is not seriously doubted.

The *mizan* in the Qur'an, however, is said to be an actual scale, "the Balance" upon which the deeds of men will be placed to determine their final destiny on the Last Day. It is said to be sent down from heaven just as the Qur'an had been sent down to Muhammad:

Allah it is who has sent down the Scripture in Truth and the Balance – and what will make you realise that the Hour may well be at hand? *Surah 42:17*

Those whose scales are found to be heavy are the prosperous who are destined to enter the bliss of Paradise but those whose scales are light will have lost their souls in the lowest hell (*Surah 7:8-9*). In this case the word for balance, *mizan*, is a genuine Arabic word but the concept of a large Scale on the Last Day is apparently borrowed from foreign sources. In an old Persian Pahlavi book predating the Qur'an known as the *Rashnu* it is taught that the Angel of Justice and one of three judges of the dead holds the "Balance" in which the deeds of men are to be weighed after death. There would be no favouring or excusing of any one in deciding the destiny of each individual.

A similar theme is found in an early apocryphal book known as the *Testament of Abraham* which was known to Origen, a famous early Church father and theologian, and which was probably written in Egypt by a Jewish convert to Christianity about two centuries after Christ. It exists in two Greek recensions and also in an early Arabic version. There are obvious parallels between the concept of the Balance in this book and the Qur'an. Abraham is said to have seen an angel with a Balance in his hand with two angels on either side of it recording each man's good and evil deeds. The narrative adds that Abraham saw a group whose good and evil deeds were equal standing between them both, neither among the saved nor the lost. The Qur'an also mentions such a group between the righteous and the wicked who will not have entered *al-Jannat* ("The Garden") but who will have an assurance of it (*Surah 7:46*). A similar account of the Balance is found in the famous Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. It seems that the concept of a large Scale on the Last Day to weigh the deeds of men to decide their fate is based on a popular legend recorded in various apocryphal and mythological works predating the Qur'an.

Lastly mention should be made of the common Qur'anic word *Rabb* meaning "Lord" used as an impersonal title for God throughout the book. In pre-Islamic times the word *rabb* was used in Aramaic to define market-chieftains, army captains and camp masters. Its use in connection with deities was rare. Leaders of the Jews, in particular their religious teachers, were regularly called *rabbis* for the same reason. They were the "great" men in their communities and this is the common meaning of the word *rabb* in Hebrew and Aramaic. By the time of Muhammad, however, the sense of "greatness" had come to be applied to Allah himself and so the title *Rabb al-'alamiin*, "Lord of the Worlds" (*Surah 1:2*), arose.

It seems, however, that Muhammad was unaware of the lesser use of the word and so, when he heard that Jews honoured their rabbis whom the Qur'an calls their *ahbarahum* (priests), he accused them of taking these leaders as *arbabaan*, "lords", in derogation of Allah (*Surah 9:31*). The word is the plural form of *rabb*. He obviously did not know that the original meaning of the word was a "great" man among his people, such as a master or chief, and that it was only later that it also became a common title for God as well. In confusion therefore he thought the Jews were deifying their priests by calling them "rabbis".

There is much evidence of foreign elements in the Qur'an. These weigh heavily against the book's claim to be a revelation from Allah alone in pure Arabic speech. It is too obvious parallels between Qur'anic stories and Jewish and Christian apocryphal works, however, that one should turn for the best proofs that much of the text of the Qur'an is based on legendary and mythical material in writings predating it.

2. TALES FROM JEWISH FOLKLORE IN THE QUR'AN

THE STORY OF CAIN AND THE BURIAL OF ABEL'S BODY

By far the greatest number of portions of the Qur'an that can be shown to have pre-Islamic origins are those that relate to Jewish folklore and other fables that were woven around Biblical narratives in the Old Testament. The Qur'an has been described as "a compendium of Talmudic Judaism" as a result of the wealth of Midrashic and Mishnaic material that has been repeated in it. It is well-known that Muhammad could read neither the Scripture of the Jews nor their folklore and, as he heard stories of Jewish antiquity repeated in market-places and elsewhere, he was unable to distinguish fact from fable and both appear side-by-side in his holy book. The evidences appear to disprove the claim that the Qur'an was revealed to him from above and the conclusion can hardly be resisted that it represents various materials that came to him from conversations, story-telling and other sources in day-to-day contact with the Jews in Arabia.

The Qur'anic account of the murder of Abel by his unrighteous brother Cain is a typical mixture of elements from the Bible, Midrash and Mishnah. It is set out in Surah 5:30-35 and begins with a statement that when they each presented an offering to God only the sacrifice of one of them was accepted. Thus far it records Biblical material (*Genesis 4:4*) but it then records a dialogue between the two brothers (who are not named) in which the one whose offering was rejected threatens to slay the other. The righteous brother responds by reaffirming his faith in God and states he will not attempt to slay him in turn (*Surah 5:30-32*). There is no parallel for this in Genesis but it is typical of the Qur'anic tendency to record conversations between unbelievers and the righteous, particularly where the former threaten the latter (an experience Muhammad himself endured regularly during his years in Mecca). Despite the faithful brother's response his wicked brother killed him. The passage then proceeds to add this incident which also has no parallel in the Biblical narrative:

Then Allah sent a raven who scratched in the ground to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. *Surah 5:34*

There is an analogy, however, to this statement in a rabbinical work of Jewish fables and myths known as the *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* contained in the section of Talmudic writings known as the Midrash. It predates the Qur'an by many centuries. In this book it is said that Adam and Eve wept when they found Abel's body and did not know what to do with it as burial was unknown to them. Then came a raven, whose companion had died, and it took its body, scratched in the earth, and buried it before their eyes. Adam then decided to do likewise and he buried Abel's body in the earth.

The only difference between the incident in the Qur'an and the story in the Midrash is that Cain is recorded as burying Abel's body in the former and Adam in the latter. Otherwise the sequel is the same. The slight variation is typical of what might be expected in the record of a man who was relying exclusively on hearsay and secondary sources because he could not read the books his Jewish storytellers were quoting. That he has borrowed from a fable in Jewish folklore, however, seems obvious. The next verse, however, also can be shown to have been derived from Talmudic material, in this case the Mishnah. It reads:

For that reason we inscribed for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew another person, other than for murder or spreading corruption in the earth, it would be as if he slew all mankind; and if anyone saved the life of one it would be as if he had saved all mankind. *Surah 5:35*

This verse appears to have no connection with the story preceding it. Why the life or death of one person would be as the salvation or destruction of all mankind is not clear. The Mishnah, however, has an interesting passage indicating its source and the connection between them:

We find it said in the case of Cain who murdered his brother, "The voice of thy brother's bloods crieth" (*Genesis 4:10*). It is not said here blood in the singular, but bloods in the plural, that is, his own blood and the blood of his seed. Man was created single in order to show that to him who kills a single individual it shall be reckoned that he has slain the whole race, but to him who preserves the life of a single individual it is counted that he hath preserved the whole race. *Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5*

This passage shows exactly where the principle of destroying or saving the whole race comes from. Because the word for "blood" is in the plural in Genesis 4:10 an ingenious rabbi invented the supposition that all Abel's offspring had been killed off with him signifying that any murderous or life-saving act had universal implications. Clearly Muhammad had no knowledge of the source of the theory but, hearing it related, he simply set out the rabbi's suppositions as the eternal decree of Allah himself!

ABRAHAM AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE IDOLS

Another narrative in the Qur'an which can be traced to a Jewish fable based on a rabbi's interpretation of a Biblical text is the story of Abraham and the Idols. The Qur'anic passages state that the patriarch one day challenged his people about the errors of their idolatry and, as soon as they left him, he confronted their images, asking why they did not eat the offerings before them or answer him intelligently (*Surah 37:91-92*). He thereupon broke them all except the biggest one. When his people called him to account and asked if he had done this, he stated it was done by the biggest one, challenging them to ask the idols who had done it. When they replied that he knew well their idols did not speak, he confronted them with worshipping apart from Allah things that could do them neither harm nor good. They were infuriated and decided to throw him into a blazing fire (*Surah 21:62-68*). Allah responded, however:

We said "O Fire! Be cooled and peaceful for Ibrahim". And when they devised a stratagem against him we made them the losers. *Surah 21:69-70*

Abraham was duly delivered from the flames unhurt. The story has no counterpart in the Bible but it is a remarkable reproduction of a story found in the *Midrash Rabbah*, yet another example of Jewish fables and folklore in the Qur'an. In this book, also predating the time of the Qur'an by many centuries, the narrative runs once again very similarly. Terah, Abraham's father, was a maker of idols and, while Abraham was deputed to watch over them, a woman came in with a plate of flour and told him to place it before them. He took a staff, broke them all except the largest one, and placed the staff in its hand. When he was challenged by his father he said that, when he set the food before them, each one demanded to eat it first at which the largest one arose, took the staff, and broke them all with it. When his father declared that they had no such understanding Abraham replied "Do your ears hear what your mouth is saying?"

It takes very little imagination to again see that Muhammad has derived a portion of his Qur'an not from divine revelation but from materials obtained from Judaic folklore literature. Yet again, however, it can be shown from a Biblical text where the fable came from and how it was ignorantly introduced into the Qur'an as a story true to history.

A Jewish scribe, Jonathan Ben Uzziel, in his *Targum*, misquoted Genesis 15:7 which reads "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldees". The word *Ur* is a Babylonian word for the city from which Abraham came out and is again mentioned by name in Genesis 11:31. The word was also used for Israel's holy city Jerusalem. It was originally called *Ur-Shalim*, the "City of Peace". The scribe, however, mistook the word to be *Or*, a Hebrew word meaning "Fire", and took the verse to mean "I am the Lord who brought you from the *fire* of the Chaldees". Commenting on this verse he said that this happened at the time when Nimrod cast Abraham into the oven of fire because he would not worship their idols and the fire was prevented from harming him.

It is most unlikely that the scribe invented the story and he is in all probability merely repeating a tradition that had been popular in Jewish folklore for some time. It can hardly be suggested, in defence of the appearance of the story in the Qur'an, that the Jews had taken a true story from the original Torah and turned it into folklore. The Qur'an accuses them of declaring their traditional writings to be scripture revealed from Allah (*Surah 2:79*) – it nowhere charges them with turning their Holy Scripture into folklore. In this case, as has been seen already, the origin of the story can be clearly traced to a *mistranslation* of the original Biblical text. The conclusion can hardly be resisted that, once again, the Qur'an repeats stories from Jewish legends and folklore.

That Muhammad was in error in many instances about Jewish history is proved again by the name he gives to Abraham's father in the Qur'an. His true name was Terah but in the Qur'an he is called *Azar*. This is evidently derived from *el-Azar*, the name of Abraham's servant in the Bible. He appears in Abraham's complaint that,

having no son, his servant Eliezer will be his heir (*Genesis 15:2*). The Qur'an confuses the name of Abraham's father with his servant. These examples all indicate that the Prophet of Islam was often confused about the information he was obtaining secondhand from the Jews and was unable to prevent historical and other errors from finding their way into the Qur'an.

OTHER JEWISH SOURCES OF QUR'ANIC TEACHINGS

There are evidences of numerous other Rabbinic legends in the Qur'an. The following verse has a Jewish parallel outside the Bible:

Had we sent down this Qur'an upon a mountain you would have seen it humble itself and cleave asunder from fear of Allah. *Surah 59:21*

In the *Targum* to Judges 5:5 ("The Mountains quaked before the Lord, yon Sinai before the Lord, the God of Israel") the rabbinical legend states that Mount Sinai humbled itself in preparation for the reception of the Torah, unlike Tabor, Hermon and Carmel which were too proud for it. The tradition adds that it was also wrenched from its place when the Torah was delivered upon it.

The Qur'an repeats the occasion when Moses remained up on the mountain for several days while his people, impatient below, forged a golden calf and worshipped it. Allah is recorded as saying to him:

We have tested the people in your absence and *as-Samiri* has led them astray. *Surah 20:85*

A few verses further on it is said that "the Samiri" (*as-Samiri*) had brought out an image of a calf from the fire before the people which they promptly worshipped when it seemed to low like a real calf. In the same Midrashic work quoted earlier, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer*, it is said that the Israelites saw the calf come forth, lowing as it did. Rabbi Jehuda stated that *Samael*, the Jewish Angel of Death according to tradition, entered into it and lowed to deceive the people. Quite clearly the Qur'anic story is again founded on a Jewish legend, but it must be asked why the angel is not mentioned but rather one of the people called *as-Samiri*. The use of the article in the ascription shows clearly it was not a man's personal name. Most Muslim commentators interpret it to mean "the Samaritan" and, as will be seen, they are probably unwittingly right in doing so. The problem, however, is that the Samaritans only came into existence as a separate people long after the exodus of the Israelites when the incident of the golden calf occurred.

The confusion obviously arises from the time when Jeroboam took away a number of the tribes of Israel from the worship of the one true God of Israel in Jerusalem at the time when Rehoboam became king on the death of Solomon. Jeroboam set up two golden calves in Samaria in Dan and Bethel as places of worship in opposition to the Temple-worship in Judea. During a later period God spoke against this practice through one of his prophets:

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will it be till they are pure in Israel? A workman made it, it is not of God. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. *Hosea 8:5-6*

It is highly probable that the Jews, who in those days regularly made the Samaritans a scapegoat for their problems, had deliberately confused this passage with the story of the golden calf in the wilderness and had blamed them for this sin as well. Alternatively Muhammad had heard a story of the golden calves of Samaria from the Jews in Arabia and had confused it with the golden calf which Moses destroyed in the wilderness. He may also have confused the name of the Angel of Death, *Samael*, with *as-Samiri* whom he names as the forger of the idol in the Qur'an. He would have been ignorant of the fact that the Samaritans had only become a separate people many centuries after the exodus.

These evidences appear to be conclusive in proof that the Qur'an can not be regarded as a divine revelation to Muhammad. It contains too many of the sort of plagiarisms from local Jewish folklore that would have been expected if his material was coming instead from what he heard and learnt in conversation with those around him. Another typical anachronism of the same kind is found in the Qur'an's citing of *Haman* as Pharaoh's chief at a time when God acted to establish the Jews in the land against their attempts to drive them out. Haman's role is

well-stated except for the fact that he lived many centuries later and attempted to wipe out the Jews when he was chief minister to Ahasuerus, the King of Persia (*Esther 3:1*).

The Qur'an contains a fabulous story about the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon not found in the Biblical record of the event. Among other details it states that when Solomon was angry that he could not see the Hoopoe among his birds he threatened to punish it severely. The Hoopoe, on arriving however, declared it had been abroad and had seen a woman ruling over *Saba* with a magnificent throne but worshipping the sun. Solomon sent the bird off with a letter to her and, once she had read it, she determined to send him a gift and thereafter to visit him (*Surah 27:20-42*). An almost identical story appears in the *Second Targum* to the Book of Esther in the legendary Jewish Talmudic literature, the only real difference being that there the bird was a redcock rather than a hoopoe. What is most significant, however, is that despite the lengthy narrative in the Qur'an the text misses the whole thrust of the purpose of the story – "she came from the ends of the earth to hear *the wisdom* of Solomon" (*Luke 11:31*). This fact is not even touched on in the Qur'an even though it is emphasised in the Targum narrative as much as in the Bible.

There is abundant evidence that much of the Qur'an is not derived from a revelation from above but from a multitude of legendary stories in Jewish folklore and tradition and that, in each case, it is obvious from minor discrepancies that Muhammad was relying on secondary sources for his information.

3. CHRISTIAN ORIGINS AND INFLUENCES

TRADITIONS ABOUT MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

One of the unique features of the Qur'an is the attention it pays to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is called *Maryam*. The nineteenth Surah is named after her. She is the only woman mentioned by name in the book and is said to have been chosen by Allah and purified above all the women of the nations (*Surah 3:42*). As with many of the Jewish sources of the Qur'an here too one finds a mixture of Biblical truth mingled with apocryphal Christian material derived from legends of later centuries. Once again there are also evidences of confusion on Muhammad's part about her life and role as well as some glaring anachronisms.

The Bible says nothing of her childhood but the Qur'an has a short narrative about her birth and a prayer which her mother offered to God just before she was born. It is recorded in the following verse:

Behold! A woman of `Imran said: "Lord! I dedicate to you what is in my womb for your special service. So accept this of me, for you are the Hearer, the Knower." *Surah 3:35*

The next verse states that she was most surprised to find herself delivered of a female child but nonetheless named her Mary and pledged herself to God for his protection. The passage goes on to say Mary was committed to the care of the priest Zakariyya and, whenever he entered her *mihrab* to see her, he found her supplied with food. He asked her whence it came to which she replied that it was from Allah who gives sustenance to whom he wills without measure (*Surah 3:37*). A *mihrab* today is the niche of every mosque which gives the direction of Mecca. In this case it must refer to a chamber in the very heart of the Jewish Temple (the *mihrab* in the mosque of Cordoba in Spain is in the form of a small chamber), particularly as Zakariyya is alone said to have access to her.

Although Mary's mother is not named both ancient and modern Muslim commentaries say that her name was Hannah. The reason is that the story in the Qur'an has a parallel in the *Protevangelium of James the Less*, an apocryphal Christian work composed some time after the Gospels of the New Testament. In this book there is a passage which states that Anna prayed to God, promising to dedicate her child, whether male or female, as a gift to God and for his service all the days of its life. When the child was born she named it Mary and it stayed in the Temple, being fed from above by an angel's hand. The similarity between this story and the Qur'anic narrative cannot be missed and it is clear where it originated.

The story is also found in other heretical works such as the Coptic *History of the Virgin*. This book states that she was nourished in the Temple like doves and that food was brought to her by the angels of God. She would remain constantly in the service of God in the Temple while the angels brought her fruits from the Tree of Life in heaven. There are many anachronisms in the story that invite further inquiry.

To begin with Mary has clearly been confused with Elijah for he was the prophet confined to solitude while ravens fed him with food from above (*1 Kings 17:6*). Nevertheless it is the name of Mary's mother in this story, Hannah, which indicates where its original composers obtained their material. For many centuries earlier a Hannah had indeed prayed for a child, promising to dedicate it to God all the days of its life (*1 Samuel 1:11*). This Hannah, however, was the mother of Samuel who, when he was born, was duly committed to the service of the Lord (*1 Samuel 1:28*) and it was he who anointed David King over Israel. It is obvious where the story came from but how did the anachronism arise? In turning to another passage the answer can be found:

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. *Luke 2:36-37*

It is quite clear now how the anachronism came about. Once again a woman whose Hebrew name was Hannah appears but it is *this* woman who remained constantly in the Temple, significantly worshipping and *fasting* night and day. Mary has clearly been confused, not only with Elijah and Hannah, the mother of Samuel, but also with Anna the prophetess. There is a further obvious similarity between the praises of both Hannah and Mary after they had been blessed with the conception of their holy sons through the power of God. Each begins with an expression of delight in the Lord and continues with an expression of praise to him who puts down the mighty and exalts the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things but turns the rich empty away (*1 Samuel 2:1-5; Luke 1:46-53*). The perceptive reader will immediately see that Hannah was a *type* of Mary just as her son Samuel was a *type* of Jesus Christ, Mary's son.

Some less perceptive minds, however, confused the two stories and compounded the confusion by mixing up the two Hannahs in the Old and New Testaments respectively, adding an anachronism from Elijah's life, thus creating a marvellous story of purely apocryphal origins. What is most surprising, however, is that its essentials have found their way into the Qur'an as a story alleged to be true to history. It is clear, once again, that Muhammad was heavily dependent on legends from former times and that he could not distinguish between Biblical truth and apocryphal myths.

Another anachronism appears in the story of Mary in the Qur'an. She has also been confused with Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron! In the Surah that bears her name it is said that, when she bore her child Jesus apparently out of wedlock, her neighbours said to her:

O Mary! Truly you have brought an amazing thing! O sister of Aaron! Your father was not an evil man nor was your mother an impure woman! *Surah 19:27-28*

In this verse she is called *ukhta Harun*, the "sister of Aaron", and there can be no doubt that the Aaron referred to is the brother of Moses as he himself is specifically recorded as speaking of *Harun akhi*, "Aaron my brother" (*Surah 20:30*). Furthermore he is the only Aaron mentioned by name in the Qur'an so there can be no question at all about his identity. In this case Muhammad's error cannot be attributed to an apocryphal writing as in the case of Hannah and Samuel. This time the confusion is entirely his own. It is also interesting to find that Miriam, the *real* sister of Aaron and Moses, is expressly called the "sister of Aaron" in the Bible (*Exodus 15:20*). The name of both these women would have been the same in Hebrew, namely *Miriam* (as they are in Arabic, *Maryam*). It is intriguing to find that even during his own lifetime certain Christians confronted Muhammad himself with this obvious error in his Qur'an:

Mughira b. Shu'ba reported: When I came to Najran, they (the Christians of Najran) asked me: You read "O sister of Harun" (i.e. Hadrat Maryam) in the Qur'an, whereas Moses was born much before Jesus. When I came back to Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) I asked him about that, whereupon he said: The people (of

the old age) used to give names (to their persons) after the names of Apostles and pious persons who had gone before them. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.1169)

With respect to the Prophet of Islam his reasoning is hard to follow. There is no other occasion in the Qur'an where anyone else is so called. In any event the word *ukhtun*, on the few occasions it appears in the Qur'an, is always used of a man's immediate blood-sister (*Surah 4:12,23,176*). Muslim commentators, endeavouring to justify Muhammad's reasoning, say the expression means "one who is related to Aaron", yet even here there is no substance in the argument. Moses and Aaron were descended from *Levi* and thus were eligible to assume the Levitical line of priesthood. Mary, on the other hand, was descended from *Judah* through the line of David (*Luke 1:32*). Accordingly she was not related to Aaron at all, other than as an Israelite, like him, descended from Abraham. She was not even of his tribe. In fact it is very interesting to find that the Bible clearly declares that Jesus (and therefore his mother Mary) were not descended from Levi at all. The Book of Hebrews states that Jesus has become an eternal high priest after the order of Melchisedec *rather than* one after the order of Aaron because he belonged to *another tribe*, being descended from Judah. His priesthood was "not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent" (*Hebrews 7:11-16*). The title given to Mary is therefore seen to be ill-founded and out of place.

That Muhammad indeed confused Mary with the real sister of Aaron is clear from the name he gives to Mary's father. In the Bible it is said that Jochebed "bore to Amran, Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister" (*Numbers 26:59*). Yet the name given to the father of the mother of Jesus in the Qur'an is *`Imran*, the Arabic form of Amran (as *Ibrahim* is the Arabic form of Abraham). She is expressly called *Maryamabnata `Imraan* "Mary, daughter of `Imran" (*Surah 66:12*). So she is not only called the sister of Aaron but also the daughter of `Imran. This is a double-proof that she has been confused with Miriam, the true sister of Moses and Aaron. There appears to be no good reason, otherwise, why she should have been given this title anyway and the passage quoted from Hebrews shows that it is, on the other hand, entirely inappropriate.

OTHER APOCRYPHAL CHRISTIAN ORIGINS AND SOURCES

A number of other legends and fables from heretical Christian works have been repeated in the Qur'an. In *Surah 18:9-26* the Qur'an contains a strange tale about a few youths, true believers in God, who took refuge from persecution in a cave where they fell asleep for a number of years. They are called *ashabal-kahf*, "Companions of the Cave" (*Surah 18:9*) and it is said that when they awoke they were amazed to find they had slept for so long. The story has many parallels in apocryphal Christian works, such as the *Acta Sanctorum* compiled by the Syriac writer Jacob of Sarug shortly before his death in 521 AD. In fact the earliest record of this legend dates no earlier than four centuries after Christ. It was mentioned by Theodosius and by Dionysius of Tell Mahra in a Syriac work of the fifth century. It has become popularly known as the story of the "seven Sleepers" as the records generally agree that there were seven of them.

The cave was said to have been near Ephesus and the sleepers were Christians fleeing from persecution during the reign of Decius the Emperor who died in 251 AD. The cave was sealed over them after they had hidden in it but during the reign of Theodosius the Second nearly two hundred years later it was opened and one of the refugees awoke and went through the city amazed to find Christianity triumphant. They then told the Emperor God had preserved them as a witness whereupon they expired. There is no obvious source for the story itself and if it was in any way built as a legend around Biblical material it could only be from Matthew 27:52-53.

Its inclusion in the Qur'an again proves that much of the teaching of the book is founded on mythical origins. This conclusion is strengthened by the paucity of details in the Qur'anic narrative. It does not say when or where it occurred nor that the men were Christians. Muhammad also did not know their number for the Qur'an says that some say three, others five, yet others seven, without giving its own decision on the matter (*Surah 18:22*) and he also did not know how long it was, saying three hundred years plus a possible nine (*Surah 18:25*). This ambiguity argues against the claim that the Qur'an came from *al-'Alim*, "the All-Knowing" Lord of the Universe, and suggests rather that it was simply Muhammad's own version of it according to the limited knowledge he possessed.

There is another legend which cannot be traced to any particular source. The disciples of Jesus are recorded as saying to him:

O Jesus son of Mary! Can your Lord send down to us a table set from heaven? *Surah 5:115*

After Jesus had prayed for such a miracle Allah is said to have sent one down with dire warnings against any unbelief on their part thereafter. It is interesting to discover that the word used here for table, *ma'idah*, is derived from a similar Ethiopic word used by the Abyssinian Christians for the Lord's Table, the main sacrament of the Christian Church. The story is probably derived from a perversion of the story of the Last Supper and the challenge of the disciples for a table to be sent down from heaven is also most likely derived from these words of the Israelites during the exodus which are recorded in very similar terms:

They spoke against God, saying, "Can God spread a table in the wilderness?" *Psalms 78:19*

Just as Mary, the mother of Jesus, has been confused with Miriam, the sister of Moses in the Qur'an, so here likewise we find Jesus confused with Moses to whom the words were originally addressed.

Clearly Muhammad obtained much of his material for the Qur'an from apocryphal Christian sources even though these were obviously secondary and unreliable. Right from the start of his mission he had discoursed with Christians. Even his first wife Khadija had a Christian cousin and this record about him is most informative:

Waraqah had been converted to Christianity in the pre-Islamic period and used to write Arabic and write of the Gospel in Arabic as much as Allah wished him to write. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.452)

It is far more probable that much of what he wrote was not the New Testament but mythical records retained in apocryphal Christian works circulating around Arabia. Muhammad shows only too often that his materials were identical to those floating around Arabia at his time, a coincidence which shows that the Qur'an is not the composition of the omniscient God but rather of a man who was restricted to the limited sources of information available to him.

4. ZOROASTRIAN AND BUDDHIST SOURCES

CONCEPTS DERIVED FROM THE ZOROASTRIAN AVESTA

Muhammad is known to have had contact with many Persians and one of his converts, Salman the Persian, is known to have come from a village in the region of Isfahan. It is not surprising, therefore, to find a number of Qur'anic concepts coinciding with Zoroastrian theories, in particular ideas derived from the *Avesta*, one of the great works of ancient Zoroastrian legend and lore. Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion of Persia prior to the Muslim conquest of the country and still survives in some remote areas of Iran to this day.

The ninety-nine names of Allah in Islam, most of which are derived from Qur'anic titles given to him, are very similar to the seventy-five names of *Ahura Mazda*, the Supreme Being of the Avesta, recorded in the section known as *Ormazd Yast*. For example both Allah and Ahura Mazda are, in the Qur'an and Avesta respectively, called "The Seeing" (*Al-Basir*, Surah 22:75, Ormazd Yast 8,12); "The Wise" (*Al-Hakim*, Surah 4:158, Ormazd Yast 15); "The Knowing" (*Al-'Alim*, Surah 15:25, Ormazd Yast 12); "The Strong" (*Al-Qawi*, Surah 22:40, Ormazd Yast 7); "The Creator" (*Al-Khaliq*, Surah 6:102, Ormazd Yast 8,13); "The Praiseworthy" (*al-Hamid*, Surah 34:6, Ormazd Yast 12); and "The Reckoner" (*Al-Hisab*, Surah 5:5, Ormazd Yast 8). These are only a selection of similar titles found in both books and it does appear that they have been incorporated from the Avesta into the Qur'an.

The *Bismillah*, the formula with which every Surah of the Qur'an commences (except the ninth), also has a parallel formula in a Zoroastrian work known as *Dasatir i Asmani* which has fifteen tractates, each of which contains this formula in its second verse: "In the name of God, the Giver, the Forgiver, the Merciful, the Just". A similar formula, "In the name of Ormazd, the Creator" occurs in the *Bundahishnih*.

A common Qur'anic word is *sirat*. It occurs forty-five times and usually means the "path" of Allah and is often found linked with the word *mustaqim* meaning the "straight path" of true religion (*Surah 1:6*). The word is not an original Arabic word and Muslim scholars such as as-Suyuti concluded that it was of Greek origin, there being derived from the Latin *strata*. It may also have been derived from the Persian *chinvat* meaning "a bridge". The probability of this origin is strengthened by a popular Islamic tradition that definitely has its origins in a Zoroastrian doctrine. There is a lengthy story in the Hadith literature about a Bridge (*As-Sirat*) that will be laid over Hell on the Last Day which all mankind will have to cross. Only true believers will succeed in crossing it while unbelievers will fall from it into hell. It is introduced as follows into the tradition:

"Then a Bridge will be laid over the (Hell) Fire". Allah's Apostle (may the peace of Allah be upon him) added, "I will be the first to cross it. And the invocation of the Apostles on that Day will be: 'Allahumma Sallim, Sallim (O Allah, save us, save us!)', and over that Bridge there will be hooks similar to the thorns of of as-Sa'dan (a thorny tree)". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 8, p.375)

This idea is borrowed from the Mazdean belief in the *Chinvat*, the great Bridge over which the dead will eventually have to walk, known in the Avesta as *Chinvato-peretus*, "the Bridge of him that reckons up" good and bad deeds. It is said in the Avesta that it extends from Mount Alburz to Chakat Daitih, reaching over the whole of hell. The righteous will enter Paradise but the unrighteous will fall from it into Hell.

In the ancient Pahlavi book known as the *Dinkart* there is a prayer of a righteous man in which he prays "that I may not arrive at the severe punishment of hell, but may cross over Chinvat and may attain to that blessed abode which is full of perfume, wholly pleasant, always brilliant" (*Dinkart*, Part 2, Cap. 81). In the Avesta Ormazd promises to good men and women "With all blessings shall I guide them to the bridge of Chinvat" (*Avesta Yasna*, 46:10). There are numerous other references to the Bridge in old Persian writings and it is from these that the Muslim concept of *as-Sirat* is clearly derived.

Another Qur'anic concept that has a striking parallel in Zoroastrian works is that of the beautiful, wide-eyed "houris" or maidens of Paradise who will delight the faithful in heaven:

And We shall join them to wide-eyed Companions (*Huwri*) ... Companions confined to pavilions – O which of the favours of your Lord will you deny? – untouched before them by any man or jinn. *Surah 52:20, 55:72-74*

The concept is very similar to the Arabian harem where a sheik has a large number of beautiful, dark-eyed concubines confined to their quarters for his pleasure at any time. There can be very little doubt that this idea is derived from Zoroastrian origins. It is interesting to discover that the Arabic word *huwr* most probably has its origins in the ancient Pahlavi word *hurust* which means "beautiful" and is used in Pahlavi books to describe the beautiful damsels of Paradise (*Arda Viraf*, 4:18). In one particular work the word is used to describe a graceful maiden of heaven, white-armed, strong with a striking face and well-formed breasts (*Hadost Nask*, 2.23). These maidens were believed by Zoroastrians to be female spirits, living in the air and connected with the stars and light.

Just as it is obvious that much of the Qur'an has been derived from Jewish folklore and apocryphal Christian literature, so it is clear that it also has many origins in the legends of Zoroastrianism.

BUDDHIST ORIGINS OF SOME QUR'ANIC TEXTS ABOUT JESUS

There are two passages in the Qur'an where certain things are said about Jesus which have no parallels in the Bible but which are obviously derived from Buddhist sources. The first relates to the actual birth of Jesus which is described in the Qur'an as follows:

So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a remote place. The pangs of childbirth came over her at the trunk of the palm-tree. She said: "Would that I had died before this and become something forgotten". One cried to her from below it: "Do not grieve, for your Lord has provided a stream below you. Shake also towards you the palm-trunk, it will let fresh ripe dates fall upon you. Eat, drink and be comforted". *Surah 19:22-26*

In the twentieth chapter of the *Historia Nativitat Mariae*, another apocryphal Christian work, there is a legend very similar to this story in the Qur'an, except that in this case the incident happened during the flight of Mary and Joseph to Egypt with the infant Jesus. Mary became tired and exhausted from the journey and suggested they rest a while under a palm-tree. Seeing it full of fruit she told him she would like to eat of it but he replied that it was far too high to reach the fruit. Suddenly the infant Jesus called out to the tree to lower its branches so that she could be refreshed. Instantly the tree bowed its canopy at her feet and she joyfully ate of its fruit. Because they were also very thirsty the infant Jesus then commanded the tree to use its roots to open a spring that was hidden in the ground so that they could also drink. Immediately streams of clear, cool water came forth from between its roots. The whole party then gave thanks to God.

Apart from the placing of this incident on the road to Egypt the story is very similar to the nativity story in the Qur'an. This is obviously one of the direct sources of the Qur'anic narrative but one has to go further back to find its original derivation as it has no Biblical counterpart.

In the Buddhist *Pali* Canon there are two stories that are remarkably similar to the nativity story and, as Buddhist monks were known to have penetrated Persia and what is today Afghanistan (statues of Buddha, usually defaced, still exist there), the transfer of the story into Christian heretical sources is easily explained. The Buddhist *Maha-Vamso* states that these Pali books were reduced to writing during the reign of King Vattagamani of Ceylon about 80 BC.

The first story occurs in the *Nidanakatha Jatakam* (Chapter 1, pp. 50-53). It is there said that when Maya, about to become the mother of Gautama Buddha, knew the time of her labour and delivery was near she obtained her husband's permission to visit her father's home. On the way she and her handmaidens entered a beautiful forest. She saw some beautiful flowers on a *sal*-tree and wished to pluck them. Suddenly the tree bent down before her and came within reach of her hand. Just as she reached out to take hold of a branch and pluck its flowers the pain of childbirth suddenly came upon her. In this case the link with the Qur'anic narrative is confirmed by the fact that, unlike the nativity story on the road to Egypt, the actual birth of the child took place below the tree. In the Qur'an, however, it is Jesus rather than Buddha who was delivered below it. Nonetheless the Qur'an seems to confuse the two stories by including the details of the palm-fruit and stream which Jesus commanded to come forth for his mother to ease her anguish.

The second story is found in the *Cariya-Pitakam* (Chapter 1, Poem 9) which states that, in a former life, Gautama Buddha was a prince called Vessantaro who, while going into exile, sought nourishment for the hungry children travelling with him. Once again trees were made to bow down to them to offer them their fruit. The Qur'anic narrative is clearly a blend of details from all these sources.

Further on in the same story of the birth of Jesus in the Qur'an there appears the second passage which is based on an apocryphal Christian work derived originally from Buddhist sources. When Mary's companions expressed their amazement that she should have a child while she was still unmarried she responded by pointing to the baby Jesus in the cradle. When they asked how they could talk with one who was still but a baby he gave them a statement to the effect that he was a servant of Allah called to be a prophet upon whom prayer and charity had been enjoined and who would be kind to his mother (*Surah 19:29-32*). The incident of Jesus speaking from the cradle is repeated in this text where Allah says:

O Jesus! Remember my favour to you and your mother, how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit so that you preached to mankind both in the cradle and in maturity. *Surah 5:113*

The immediate source of this story is the Arabic *Gospel of the Infancy*, a typical apocryphal Christian work known only from an Arabic text and probably of Coptic origin. Right at the beginning there is the declaration mentioned in the last chapter that Jesus spoke from the cradle to the effect that he was the Son of God whom his Father had sent for the salvation of the nations. It is well-known that during his lifetime Muhammad was sent two girls as a present from the governor of Egypt one of whom, Miriam, became his close companion and is said to have become one of his wives. She bore him a son, Ibrahim, who died in infancy. Such connections with the land of Egypt would have given Muhammad access to such legendary Christian material.

The ultimate source of the story, however, is a similar story about Buddha told in the *Buddha Carita* (Book 1, passage 34), as well as in the *Lalita Vistara*. Buddha is said immediately after his birth to have walked seven steps towards each quarter of the horizon and at each point a lotus flower sprung from beneath his feet. As he looked at each of them he exclaimed "In all the world I am chief". In another Chinese Sanskrit work a similar story of the baby Buddha speaking at his birth appears. In this narrative he declares that he has reached the last stage of reincarnation and was finished with renewed births, declaring he had been born just this once more for the purpose of saving the world.

There is abundant evidence that the Qur'an is dependent on a number of different legendary and fabulous sources for many of its stories and this fact seriously undermines its claim to have been a revelation from God as the final Scripture for all mankind.

Chapter Five

The Compilation of the Text of the Qur'an

1. THE INITIAL COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AN

THE FIRST COLLECTION UNDER ABU BAKR

Most books are written out as a complete text from cover to cover with the outline from the introduction to the conclusion planned well in advance before a word is written. The Qur'an, on the other hand, was never compiled into book form during the time of Muhammad and it was only his death which actually completed its text. It came to him during his lifetime in staggered portions and although its final form had been settled in principle prior to his death there was no single collection of its surahs and passages in a written form in anyone's possession.

While he lived there was always a possibility that fresh revelations could be added to the text. Indeed it would have seemed inappropriate to any of his companions to attempt to codify it in written form, especially as the main means of retaining its contents at the time was in the memory of those who had consciously endeavoured to learn the Qur'an by heart. Some of it had been written out on different materials such as pieces of wood, palm-leaves and the like. It also appears that new passages were coming to Muhammad with increasing frequency shortly before his demise, making an attempt at a single collection even more improbable:

Allah sent down his Divine Inspiration to His Apostle (saw) continuously and abundantly during the period preceding his death till He took him unto Him. That was the period of the greatest part of revelation, and Allah's Apostle (saw) died after that. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.474)

It is expressly stated by one of the major Muslim scholars of the Qur'an in Islamic history that the text had been completely written down and carefully preserved but that it had not been assembled into a single location during the lifetime of the Prophet (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.96). Once the primary recipient of the Qur'an had passed away, however, it was only logical that a collection should be made of the whole Qur'an into a single text. The traditions of Islam state that four men knew the Qur'an during Muhammad's lifetime in its entirety, one of whom was Zaid ibn Thabit (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.97). He was soon called upon to compile a written codex of the text.

Shortly after the Prophet's death a number of tribes recently converted to Islam in the Arabian Peninsula reverted to Arabian paganism and revolted against Muslim rule. Muhammad's successor Abu Bakr sent an army to subdue them and in the subsequent Battle of Yamama a number of the companions who knew the Qur'an directly

from their Prophet were killed. Others with a similar knowledge also passed away and with them their own readings of the text:

Many of the companions of the Prophet of Allah (saw) had their own readings of the Qur'an, but they died and their readings disappeared soon afterwards. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.83)

Abu Bakr realised that there was a danger that the Qur'an might be lost if any more of its best-known reciters passed away. He told Zaid that he was a young man above suspicion who had been known to write down portions of the Qur'an and he accordingly commissioned him to search for its portions and collect it into a single codex. Zaid was initially taken back at the idea and later recorded what followed:

By Allah! If they had ordered me to shift one of the mountains, it would not have been heavier for me than this ordering me to collect the Qur'an. Then I said to Abu Bakr, "How will you do something which Allah's Apostle (saw) did not do?" Abu Bakr replied "By Allah, it is a good project". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.477)

Zaid eventually approved after Abu Bakr and `Umar had pressed the urgency of the task upon him and set about collecting the Qur'an. It was to be a unique undertaking as the contents of the book were spread widely among the companions and were recorded on various materials. His hesitancy at first shows that the project would not be easy. He did not believe that either he or any of the other companions who knew the text well could be relied on simply to write it out from memory. Instead he proceeded to make a thorough search for the text from a variety of sources and he recorded his investigation in these words:

So I started looking for the Qur'an and collected it from (what was written on) palm-leaf stalks, thin white stones, and also from men who knew it by heart, till I found the last verse of Surat at-Tauba (repentance) with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.478)

The two primary sources, amongst the others mentioned, were later defined as *ar-riqa`a* ("the parchments") and *sudur ar-rijjal* ("the breasts of men"), namely not only texts from those who had memorised the Qur'an but also whatever written materials he could find (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.137). Nonetheless he was not the only companion of the Prophet to begin to codify the Qur'an into a single written text (a *mushaf*) and may not even have been the first to succeed in doing so. The following tradition states that another of the early reciters was the first to write it down and collect it:

It is reported ... from Ibn Buraidah who said: "The first of those to collect the Qur'an into a *mushaf* (codex) was Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifah". (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.135)

This Salim is one of only four men who was recommended by Muhammad as the best reciters of the Qur'an from whom its contents should be learnt (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.96) and he was one of the *qurra* ("reciters") killed at the Battle of Yamama. As it was only after this battle that Zaid began to collect his material Salim's codex must indeed have preceded his as the first written copy of the Qur'an. Nonetheless Islamic tradition pays primary attention to Zaid's codex not only because it was called for by the first Caliph himself but also for other reasons which will shortly become apparent.

PERSPECTIVES ON ZAID'S COLLECTION OF THE QUR'AN

Muslims claim that the Qur'an as it stands today is an exact record of the original without so much as a dot or stroke ever having been lost, changed, or substituted in any way. This is a strange claim to make for a book which had to be compiled piecemeal from various sources scattered among the companions of Muhammad, particularly in the light of further evidences that some passages have been lost, that others have been abrogated, and that other codices compiled about the same time as Zaid's had numerous readings that differed from his and from each other's. These evidences will shortly be considered. At this point, however, it must be said that Zaid's final compilation was the result of an honest human attempt to collect the Qur'an as far as he was able to and there is no reason to suspect that it does not generally project the text as it stood by the time of the Prophet's death.

There are evidences even at this early stage, however, that portions of the Qur'an were irretrievably lost at the Battle of Yamama when many of the *qurra* who had memorised whole portions of it had perished:

Many (of the passages) of the Qur'an that were sent down were known by those who died on the Day of Yamama ... but they were not known (by those who) survived them, nor were they written down, nor had Abu Bakr, `Umar or `Uthman (by that time) collected the Qur'an, nor were they found with even one (person) after them. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.23)

The negative impact of this passage can hardly be missed: *lam ya`alam* – "not known", *lam yuktab* – "not written down", *lam yuwjad* – "not found", a threefold emphasis on the fact that these portions of the Qur'an which had gone down with the *qurra* who had died at Yamama were lost forever and could not be recovered.

There are evidences in the tradition literature to show that even Muhammad himself was occasionally inclined to forget portions of the Qur'an. One of these taken from a major Hadith work reads as follows:

Aishah said: A man got up (for prayer) at night, he read the Qur'an and raised his voice in reading. When morning came, the Apostle of Allah (saw) said: May Allah have mercy on so-and-so! Last night he reminded me of a number of verses I was about to forget. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1114)

There is no evidence to suggest that Zaid had compiled an official or standard codex of the Qur'an even though Abu Bakr was the immediate successor of Muhammad as head of the Muslim community. The object was apparently to ensure that he was in possession of a complete written text to ensure its preservation. For the next twenty years virtually nothing is said of this codex other than that, by the time of `Uthman's caliphate, it was in the private possession of Hafsa, `Umar's daughter and one of Muhammad's wives, and was kept under her bed.

It is important in concluding a study of Zaid's text to analyse the comment he made about two verses of the Qur'an which he had searched for and had found only with Abu Khuzaimah. The full text of his eventual discovery is recorded in these words:

I found the last verse of Surat at-Tauba (Repentance) with Abi Khuzaima al-Ansari, and I did not find it with anybody other than him. The verse is: "Verily there has come to you an Apostle from amongst yourselves. It grieves him that you should receive any injury or difficulty ... (till the end of Bara`a)". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.478)

It is quite clear from this passage that Zaid was dependent on one source alone for the last two verses of *Surat at-Tauba*. In fact there is another tradition which shows that it was not Zaid who sought earnestly for the exact text of a pair of verses which he recalled but could not trace. In this record it is stated that it was Abu Khuzaimah himself who drew the attention of the compilers to a text they were overlooking:

Khuzaima ibn Thabit said: "I see you have overlooked (two) verses and have not written them". They said "And which are they?" He replied "I had it directly from the messenger of Allah (saw) (Surah 9, ayah 128): 'There has come to you a messenger from yourselves. It grieves him that you should perish, for he is very concerned about you : to the believers he is kind and merciful', to the end of the surah". `Uthman said "I bear witness that these verses are from Allah". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.11)

The significant feature of this passage is the implication that Zaid and his redactors would have missed these verses completely had Abu Khuzaimah not mentioned them. He makes a point of the fact that he received them "directly" (*tilqiyya*) from the Prophet meaning obviously that he had heard them firsthand and had not obtained them from secondary sources. The passage goes on to say that Abu Khuzaimah was subsequently asked where they should be inserted in the Qur'an and he suggested they be added to the last part of the text to be revealed, namely the close of Surat at-Tauba (Bara`a in the text).

For many years there was no further development in reducing the text of the Qur'an to a standard form for the whole Muslim community. Events in the time of `Uthman's caliphate, however, led to the next stage.

2. `UTHMAN'S RECENSION OF ZAID'S COMPILATION

THE ORDER TO DESTROY ALL THE OTHER CODICES

The codex of Zaid ibn Thabit was clearly one of great importance and its retention in official custody during the caliphates respectively of Abu Bakr and `Umar testify to its key significance during the time of the Qur'an's initial codification. There can be little doubt, however, that this codex was at no time publicised during this period or declared to be the official text for the whole Muslim world.

There were a number of other masters among the *qurra* who had gone to great lengths to memorise the Qur'an. Islamic tradition states that by the time `Uthman became caliph twelve years after the death of the Prophet there were written codices in use in different provinces compiled by other well-known companions, in particular `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud and Ubayy ibn Ka`b. There was no official reaction at first to this development as Zaid's text had never been intended as an official copy and the credibility of these men in their knowledge of the Qur'an had never been doubted. They are mentioned along with two others as having been acknowledged by Muhammad himself during his lifetime as the foremost authorities on the Qur'an:

Narrated Masruq: `Abdullah bin Mas`ud was mentioned before `Abdullah bin `Amr who said "That is a man I still love, as I heard the Prophet (saw) saying, 'Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four: from `Abdullah bin Mas`ud – he started with him – Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, Mu`adh bin Jabal and Ubai bin Ka`b'". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, p.96)

The special mention of the fact that Muhammad started with `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud indicates that the Prophet regarded him as the most knowledgeable Qur'an reciter among his companions. In fact, while the codices of this man and other prominent reciters became prominent in the developing Muslim world the codex of Zaid faded into virtual obscurity. It had simply receded into the private custody of Hafsa, one of the widows of the Prophet (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.478).

Seven years after his accession to leadership of the Muslim world, however, `Uthman was faced with a crisis which threatened to break up the Muslim world and undermine his unchallenged leadership over it. It came from the very areas where the other companions were so highly respected because of their unique knowledge of the Qur'an and the fame their codices enjoyed. Circumstances gave him an opportunity to severely subvert their authority by ordering that their codices be destroyed in the interests of standardising one text for the whole Muslim community. His opportunity came when the Muslim general Hudhayfah ibn al-Yaman, leading an expedition of Muslim forces from what is today Syria and Iraq, discovered that the people there were disputing with each other about the reading of the Qur'an. The codex of `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud was the standard text of the Muslims at Kufa while that of Ubayy ibn Ka`b held sway in Damascus. Hudhayfah immediately reported the matter to `Uthman. What followed is described in the following tradition:

Hudhaifa was afraid of their (the people of Sha`m and Iraq) differences in the recitation of the Qur'an, so he said to `Uthman, 'O Chief of the Believers! Save this nation before they differ about the Book (Qur'an) as Jews and Christians did before'. So `Uthman sent a message to Hafsa, saying, 'Send us the manuscripts of the Qur'an so that we may compile the Qur'anic materials in perfect copies and return the manuscripts to you'. Hafsa sent it to `Uthman. `Uthman then ordered Zaid ibn Thabit, `Abdullah bin az-Zubair, Sa`id bin al-`As, and `Abdur-Rahman bin Harith bin Hisham to rewrite the manuscripts in perfect copies. `Uthman said to the three Quraishi men, 'In case you disagree with Zaid bin Thabit on any point in the Qur'an, then write it in the dialect of the Quraish as the Qur'an was revealed in their tongue'. They did so, and when they had written many copies, `Uthman returned the original manuscripts to Hafsa. `Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.479)

There is no suggestion that he considered the other codices to be unreliable. It was the divisions between the Muslims in the reciting of the text that made him realise the need to act as he foresaw the possibility that the Muslim world would break up into sects and divisions. By unifying the people on a single text of the Qur'an he

saw an occasion to prevent such a partition occurring. The following tradition gives a balanced picture of the circumstances and explains why he chose Zaid's codex as the basis on which the Qur'an text was to be standardised for the Muslim community. `Ali is reported to have said of `Uthman:

By Allah, he did not act or do anything in respect of the manuscripts (*masahif*) except in full consultation with us, for he said, "What is your opinion in this matter of *qira'at* (reading)? It has been reported to me that some are saying 'My reading is superior to your reading'. That is a perversion of the truth". We asked him, "What is your view (on this)?" He answered, "My view is that we should unite the people on a single text (*mushaf wahid*), then there will be no further division or disagreement". We replied "What a wonderful idea!" Someone from the gathering there asked, "Whose is the purest (Arabic) among the people and whose reading (is the best)?" They said the purest (Arabic) among the people was that of Sa'id ibn al-`As and the (best) reader among them was Zaid ibn Thabit. He (`Uthman) said, "Let the one write and the other dictate". Thereafter they performed their task and he united the people on a (single) text. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.22)

The motive is twice stated in this extract to simply be the desire to bring consensus among the Muslims on the basis of a single text. If any of the leaders involved in the process had believed that the other codices were unreliable or that Zaid's was a perfect compilation of the Qur'an to the last dot and letter they would simply have ordered their scribes to transcribe it. Their decision to choose Zaid and Sa'id because of their proficiency in the reading and Arabic knowledge of the Qur'an respectively shows that, as at the time when Zaid's text was first commissioned, the aim was to get as close to the original as possible.

The question that might well be asked, however, is why Zaid's text was called for and why copies were made to be sent as the official copies of the Qur'an in each province while the others then in use had to be burnt and destroyed. One reason has already been given, namely to reimpose `Uthman's authority over the Muslims scattered throughout the Muslim provinces. Zaid's text, being kept in official custody at Medina, was ideal for this purpose. Also, it had not been in general public use so there had been no division about its contents. The standardising of a Medinan text at the seat of the Caliph's government enabled him to suppress the popularity of other reciters in areas where he was becoming unpopular. He was placing members of his own family, the descendants of Umayya who had opposed Muhammad until the conquest of Mecca, in positions of authority over them. Zaid's text was thus chosen not because it was believed to be superior to the others but because it suited `Uthman's purposes in standardising the text of the Qur'an.

The fact that none of the other texts was spared shows that not one of them, Zaid's included, was in complete agreement with any of the others. There must have been serious textual variants between the codices to warrant such drastic action. The order to consign all but one of the written texts (*masahif*) to the flames indicates that serious divisions existed between them. This was perhaps a circumstance to be expected when it is remembered that the Qur'an had not been reduced to a single text at Muhammad's death. At the time it was widely scattered piecemeal among a number of his companions and that mainly in their memories, the most fallible of sources.

THE REVISION OF ZAIID'S CODEX OF THE QUR'AN

Muslims often claim that all that `Uthman sought to achieve was to cancel out the different readings of the Qur'an in its various dialects. The issue was, they say, purely one of eliminating different pronunciations. This line of reasoning is subjectively advanced to maintain the hypothesis that the Qur'an, in its written form, is a divinely preserved and therefore perfect text. There were no vowel points, however, in those early codices and any differences in pronunciation would not have appeared in the texts. He could only have ordered the burning of all other codices if there were serious differences in the text itself. Evidences will be given in the next section to show that this was indeed the case.

In fact, shortly after his decree had been put into effect, `Uthman enquired what the grievances were of the Muslims whose opposition to him was intensifying. One of their complaints was that he had "obliterated the Book of Allah" (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.36). They did not accuse him simply of destroying their *masahif* (codices) but of burning the *kitabullah*, the Qur'an, itself. Although his action contributed towards the standardising of an official text it also left a keen antagonism as they believed he had ruined authentic manuscripts of the Qur'an compiled by some of Muhammad's closest companions.

There are further evidences that Zaid's codex was not at this time considered an infallible copy of the Qur'an. `Uthman not only ordered his text to be copied but also called for it to be revised at the same time. When he appointed the four redactors mentioned he chose the other three because they were from the Quraish tribe at Mecca while Zaid came from among the *ansar* of Medina. He said that, if they should differ at any point in respect of the language of the Qur'an, they were to overrule Zaid and write it in the Quraish dialect as it had been originally revealed in it (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.466).

At the same time Zaid, after the manuscripts had been copied out, suddenly remembered another text that was missing from the Qur'an:

Zaid said "I missed a verse from *al-Ahzab* (Surah 33) when we transcribed the *mushaf*. I used to hear the messenger of Allah (saw) reciting it. We searched for it and found it with Khuzaimah ibn Thabit al-Ansari: 'From among the believers are men who are faithful in their covenant with Allah' (33:23). So we inserted it in the (relevant) surah in the text". (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.138)

A similar record of this omission is recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Vol.6, p.479). It shows that even Zaid's original attempt to produce a complete codex was not entirely successful. It is remarkable in the light of these evidences to hear Muslims not only claiming that the Qur'an in their hands today is an exact, perfect redaction of the original but also alleging that this proves the divine origin of the book. The facts show otherwise. It was not Allah who arranged the text in its present form but rather the young man Zaid and that only according to the best of his ability. Nor was it Muhammad who codified or standardised it for the Muslim *ummah* but `Uthman and that only after a complete revision of one codex at the expense of all the others. The Qur'an in the possession of Muslims today is simply a revised edition of Zaid's initial compilation.

Even after this time disputes still arose regarding the authenticity of the text. A good example concerns a variant reading of Surah 2:238 which, in the Qur'an standardised by `Uthman, reads "Maintain your prayers, particularly the middle prayer (*as-salaatil wustaa*), and stand before Allah in devoutness". The variant reading is given in this hadith:

`Aishah ordered me to transcribe the Holy Qur'an and asked me to let her know when I should arrive at the verse *Hafidhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatil wustaa wa quumuu lillaahi qaanitiin* (2:238). When I arrived at the verse I informed her and she ordered: Write it in this way, *Hafidhuu alaas-salaati waas-salaatil wustaa wa salaatil-`asri wa quumuu lillaahi qaanitiin*. She added that she had heard it so from the Apostle of Allah (saw). (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.64)

`Aishah was a very prominent woman in Islam being one of the widows of the Prophet, and she would not have recommended such a change lightly. She ordered the scribe to add the words *wa salaatil `asr* meaning "and the afternoon prayer", giving Muhammad himself as the direct source of her authority for this reading. On the same page there is a similar tradition where Hafsah, another of his widows, ordered her scribe `Amr ibn Rafi to make the same amendment to her codex. It is known that Hafsah had a codex of her own in addition to the codex of Zaid in her possession. Ibn Abi Dawud refers to it as a separate manuscript under the heading *Mushaf Hafsah Zauj an-Nabi (saw)* ("The Codex of Hafsah, the Widow of the Prophet"). He specifically records this same incident as a variant reading in her codex:

It is written in the codex of Hafsah, the widow of the Prophet (saw): "Observe your prayers, especially the middle prayer and the afternoon prayer". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.87)

Ibn Abi Dawud also states on the same page that this variant was found in the codices of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Umm Salama and Ibn Abbas. Some commentators accepted that it contained an injunction to specially observe the afternoon prayer in addition to the midday prayer while others said it was merely an elaboration of the text and that the *salatil-wusta* was the same as the *salatil-`asr* as in this tradition:

It is said by Abu Ubaid in his *Fadhail al-Qur'an* ("The Excellences of the Qur'an") that the purpose of a variant reading (*al-qira`atash-shaathat*) is to explain the standard reading (*al-qira`atal-mash`huurat*) and to illustrate its

meaning, as in the (variant) reading of `Aishah and Hafsa, *wa salaatil wustaa salaatil 'asr*. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.193)

It was variants such as this that led to Hafsa's codex being destroyed when Marwan ibn al-Hakam was governor of Medina some time after the death of `Uthman. While Hafsa was still alive she refused to give it up though he anxiously sought to destroy it (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.24) and it was only upon her death that he got hold of it and ordered its destruction fearing, he said, that if it became well-known the same variant readings `Uthman sought to suppress would occur again.

The Muslim world today boldly professes a single text of the Qur'an yet those of `Uthman's time accused him, saying that the Qur'an had been in many books and that he had discredited them all except one. A high price had been paid to obtain one standardised text for all time.

3. VARIANT READINGS IN THE OTHER CODICES

`ABDULLAH IBN MAS`UD: AN AUTHORITY ON THE QUR'AN

Although `Uthman succeeded in destroying the other codices he was unable to suppress the fact that they had been compiled. Because the preferred method of learning the Qur'an was still by memorisation he could not entirely eliminate the variant readings known to exist between them and Zaid's codex. He also had to contend with the fact that many of their compilers were renowned Qur'an reciters. One of the best known was `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud who is recorded as being "the first man to speak the Qur'an loudly in Mecca after the apostle" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p.141). The hadith record which records that Muhammad specifically started with him as a leading authority on the Qur'an is supported by the following tradition where he expresses his own knowledge of the book:

There is no Sura revealed in Allah's book but I know at what place it was revealed; and there is no verse revealed in Allah's Book but I know about whom it was revealed. And if I know that there is somebody who knows Allah's Book better than I, and he is at a place that camels can reach, I would go to him. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.488)

In a similar tradition he added to this that he had once recited more than seventy surahs in Muhammad's presence and claimed that all of the Prophet's companions were aware that no one knew the Qur'an better than he. Shaqiq, one of the companions sitting there, stated that no one argued with him or found any fault in his recitation (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p.1312). It also cannot be doubted that he was one of those who collected the Qur'an into written form shortly after Muhammad's death. Ibn Abi Dawud devotes no less than nineteen pages to the variant readings between his text and that of Zaid ibn Thabit (*Kitab al-Masahif*, pp. 54-73). It is also well known that Ibn Mas`ud initially refused to hand his codex over for destruction and for a while after one of the copies of Zaid's manuscript arrived at Kufa the majority of the Muslims there still adhered to Ibn Mas`ud's text.

There are solid evidences that his reason for resisting `Uthman's order was that he considered his own codex to be far superior to Zaid's and before Hudhayfah ever reported the existence of variant readings to the Caliph he had some sharp words with him.

Hudhaifah said "It is said by the people of Kufa 'the reading of `Abdullah (ibn Mas`ud)', and it is said by the people of Basra 'the reading of Abu Musa'. By Allah! If I come to the Commander of the Faithful (`Uthman), I will demand that they be drowned". `Abdullah said to him "Do so, and by Allah you also will be drowned, but not in water". (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.13)

When Hudhayfah also challenged him that he had been sent to the people of Kufa as their teacher and there had made them submit to his reading of the Qur'an, Ibn Mas`ud replied that he had not led the people astray, again claiming that no one knew the Qur'an better than himself (Ibn Abi Dawud, p.14). On another occasion he had this to say about his knowledge of the Qur'an in contrast with Zaid's proficiency:

I acquired directly from the messenger of Allah (saw) seventy surahs when Zaid was still a childish youth – must I now forsake what I acquired directly from the messenger of Allah? (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.15)

It is also recorded that when news of `Uthman's order to destroy the other codices and to use Zaid's alone to obtain uniformity in reading reached Kufa Ibn Mas`ud gave a *khutba*, a sermon on the subject and declared to the Muslims of the city:

The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the Qur'an. I like it better to read according to the recitation of him (Prophet) whom I love more than that of Zayd Ibn Thabit. By Him besides whom there is no god! I learnt more than seventy surahs from the lips of the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, while Zayd ibn Thabit was a youth, having two locks and playing with the youth. (Ibn Sa`d, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.444)

One thing is obvious from these statements – Ibn Mas`ud regarded his codex as a more authentic record of the original Qur'an text than the one compiled by Zaid and standardised by `Uthman as the sole text to be used throughout the Muslim world thereafter.

Muslim writers try to get around the implications of these evidences by suggesting that it was only a sentimental attachment to his codex that made Ibn Mas`ud react so strongly against the Caliph's order or, once again, that the variant readings were confined solely to differences in pronunciation. It is quite clear, however, that it was his conviction that his codex was superior to Zaid's that made him angry and, as shall be seen, the variant readings related to real differences in the text itself.

THE VARIANT READINGS IN THE OTHER CODICES

One of the interesting facets of Ibn Mas`ud's codex was the total omission of the opening chapter, the *Suratul-Fatihah*, from his text as well as the *mu`awwithatayni*, the last two surahs of the Qur'an. The form of these chapters has some significance – the first is purely a prayer to Allah and the last two are "charm" surahs against evil forces. In all three the words are the expression of the believer as speaker rather than Allah himself. The possibility that Ibn Mas`ud had denied the validity of these surahs troubled early Muslim historians. Fakhruddin ar-Razi, the author of a commentary on the Qur'an titled *Mafatih al-Ghayb* ("The Keys of the Unseen") who lived in the sixth century of Islam admitted that this had "embarrassing implications" and used the strange reasoning that Ibn Mas`ud had probably not heard himself from the Prophet that they were to be included in the Qur'an. Ibn Hazm, another scholar, simply charged without giving any reasons that this was "a lie attributed to Ibn Mas`ud". Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, however, in his famous *Fath al-Baari* (a review of the Sahih al-Bukhari) accepted these reports as sound, stating that Ibn Mas`ud had omitted them because the Prophet, to his knowledge, had only commanded that the surahs be used as incantations against evil forces and that, while he accepted them as sound, he had been reluctant to include them in his text (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, pp.186-187).

There were numerous differences between Ibn Mas`ud's codex and Zaid's in respect of the rest of the text and no less than one-hundred-and-one occur in *Suratul-Baqarah* alone. A review of some these will indicate the nature of these variant readings.

Surah 2:275 begins with the words *Allathiina yaakuluunar-ribaa laa yaquumuuna* – "those who devour usury will not stand". Ibn Mas`ud's text had the same introduction but added the words *yawmal qiyaamati*, namely "on the Day of Resurrection". The variant is mentioned in Abu Ubaid's *Kitab Fadhail al-Qur'an* and was also recorded in the codex of Talha ibn Musarrif, a secondary codex said to have been dependent on Ibn Mas`ud's text, Talha likewise being based at Kufa.

Surah 5:91, in the standard text, contains the exhortation *fasiyaamu thalaathati ayyaamin* – "fast for three days". Ibn Mas`ud's text added the adjective *mutataabi`aatin* meaning three "successive" days. This variant is derived from at-Tabari's famous commentary titled *Jami` al-Bayan `an Ta`wil ay al-Qur'an* (7.19.11) and was also mentioned by Abu Ubaid. This variant was found in Ubayy ibn Ka'b's text as well as in the codices of Ibn `Abbas and Ibn Mas`ud's pupil Ar-Rabi ibn Khuthaim.

Surah 6:153 begins *Wa anna haathaa siraati* – "Verily this is my path". Ibn Mas'ud's text read *Wa haathaa siraatu rabbakum* – "This is the path of your Lord". The variant derives again from at-Tabari (8.60.16). Ubayy ibn Ka'b had the same reading, except that for *rabbakum* his text read *rabbika*. The secondary codex of Al-A'mash, mentioned by Ibn Abi Dawud in his *Kitab al-Masahif* (p.91), also began with the variant *wa haathaa* as in the texts of Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b. Ibn Abi Dawud also adds a further variant, suggesting that Ibn Mas'ud read the word *siraat* with the Arabic letter *sin* rather than the standard *sad* (*Kitab al-Masahif*, p.61).

Surah 33:6 contains the following statement about the relationship between Muhammad's wives and the community of Muslim believers: *wa azwajuhuu ummahaatuhuu* – "and his wives are their mothers". Ibn Mas'ud's text added the words *wa huwa abuu laahum* – "and he is their father". This variant is also recorded by at-Tabari (21.70.8) and was also recorded in the codices of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ibn 'Abbas, Ikrima and Mujahid ibn Jabr except that in the last three texts mentioned the statement that Muhammad is their father precedes the one which makes his wives their mothers. The codex of Ar-Rabi ibn Khuthaim, however, follows Ibn Mas'ud's in placing it at the end of the clause. The considerable number of references for this variant reading argue strongly for its possible authenticity over and against its omission in the codex of Zaid ibn Thabit.

In many other examples the variant relates to the form of a word which has slightly altered its meaning, as in Surah 3:127 where Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b both read *wa saabiquu* ("be ahead") for *wa saari'uu* ("be quick") in the standard text. The variant again derives from at-Tabari (4.109.15). In other instances a single word has been added not affecting the sense of the text as in Surah 6:16 where once again Ibn Mas'ud and Ubayy ibn Ka'b recorded the same variant, namely *yusrifillaahu* – "averted by Allah" – for the standard *yusraf* – "averted". This variant is recorded in Maki's *Kitab al-Kasf*.

It is important to remember that these are not variants which reflect adversely on the codices which were destroyed as though the text standardised by 'Uthman was above reproach while all these were full of aberrant readings. Zaid's codex was just one of many which had been compiled shortly after Muhammad's death and it was purely as a matter of convenience that it was preferred above the others. The prominence which Ibn Mas'ud enjoyed as a reciter, and his claim that he knew the Qur'an better than Zaid, should also be remembered. It is also most significant to find that Ubayy ibn Ka'b also was regarded as one of the best readers of the Qur'an by the Prophet himself:

Affan ibn Muslim informed us .. on the authority of Anas ibn Malik, he on the authority of the Prophet, may Allah bless him; he said: The best reader (of the Qur'an) among my people is Ubayyi ibn Ka'b. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p.441)

As a result he became known as *Sayyidul-Qurra*, the "Master of the Readers". Another tradition states that 'Umar himself confirmed that he was the best of the Muslims in the recitation of the Qur'an (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.489). It is therefore significant to find that numerous variant readings existed between his and Zaid's text.

For example, in place of *wa yush-hidullaaha* in Surah 2:204 he read *wa yastash-hidullaaha*. He also omitted the words *in khifum* from Surah 4:101. Then again, in Surah 5:48 where the standard reading is *wa katabnaa 'alayhim fiiha* – "and we inscribed therein for them (the Jews)" – the reading of Ubayy was *wa anzalallaahu alaa banii Isra'iila fiiha* – "and Allah sent down therein to the Children of Israel". The variant was also recorded by at-Tabari (6.153.24).

The evidences all show that, prior to the endeavour by 'Uthman to standardise one codex for the purposes of obtaining uniformity of reading, there were numerous different readings of the Qur'an among the best known of the reciters. It took time for the Qur'an to become a single text and, as shall be seen, a second redaction was necessary some centuries later to standardise the vocalised text as well. One thing is quite obvious from all these readings, however – there is no foundation for the Muslim claim that the Qur'an presently read in the Muslim world is an exact copy of the original text at the time of Muhammad.

4. MISSING PASSAGES OF THE QUR'AN TEXT

THE MUSHAF: AN INCOMPLETE RECORD OF THE QUR'AN TEXT

During the Battle of Yamama shortly after Muhammad's death a number of the *qurra*, reciters of the Qur'an, perished and, as has been seen already, some passages of the text are said to have disappeared with them. No one else is said to have known these texts and it must be assumed that they passed away with them. There are many other records to show that individual verses and, at times, whole passages are missing from the Qur'an in its standardised form. These all serve to indicate that the *mushaf* of the Qur'an, as Muslims read it today, is in fact an incomplete record of the original handed down to them. `Abdullah ibn `Umar, in the earliest days of Islam, had this to say on the subject:

Let none of you say "I have acquired the whole of the Qur'an". How does he know what all of it is when much of the Qur'an has disappeared? Rather let him say "I have acquired what has survived". (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.524)

There are many examples that could be quoted but a selection of these should suffice to prove the point. A typical case relates to a verse which is said to have read:

The religion with Allah is *al-Hanifiyyah* (the Upright Way) rather than that of the Jews or the Christians, and those who do good will not go unrewarded. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.525)

It is said that this verse at one time formed part of *Suratul-Bayyinah* (Surah 98). This is quite possible as it fits well into the context of the short surah which contains, in other verses, some of the words appearing in the missing text, such as *din* (religion, v.5), *`aml* (to do, v.7) and *hunafa* (upright, v.4). It also contrasts the way of Allah with the beliefs of the Jews and Christians.

It is also interesting to note that, whereas the standard text of Surah 3:19 today reads *innadiina `indallaahil-Islaam* – "the religion before Allah is al-Islam (i.e. the Submission)", Ibn Mas`ud read in place of *al-Islam* the title *al-Haniffiyah*, i.e. "the Upright Way". At the beginning of Muhammad's prophetic mission there were a number of people in Arabia who disclaimed the worship of idols and called themselves *hunafa*, specifically meaning those who follow the upright way and who scorn the false creeds surrounding them.

It is possible that this was the initial name of the specific faith which Muhammad later called Islam as his religion took on its own special identity and as his followers specifically came to be called Muslims, those who submit to Allah. This would account for the subsequent lapse of the title in the Qur'an and the omission of the text which is said to have been part of the text.

There are further evidences of whole surahs said to be missing from the Qur'an in its present form. Abu Musa Al-`Ashari, one of the earliest authorities on the Qur'an text and a companion of Muhammad, is reported to have said to the *qurra* in Basra:

We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) *Bara'at*. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.501)

The one verse he said he could recall is one of the well-known texts said to be missing from the Qur'an. Abu Musa went on to say:

We used to recite a surah similar to one of the *Musabbihaat*, and I no longer remember it, but this much I have indeed preserved: "O you who truly believe. Why do you preach that which you do not practise? (and) that is inscribed on your necks as a witness and you will be examined about it on the Day of Resurrection". (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.526)

The tradition as here quoted follows the record of it in the Sahih Muslim where it is set out after the statement about the surah resembling the ninth surah and containing the verse about the son of Adam (Vol.2, p.501). The *Musabbihaat* are those surahs of the Qur'an (numbers 57, 59, 61, 62 and 64) which begin with the words *Sabbahu* (or *yusabbihu*) *lillaahi maa fiis-samaawaati wal-ardh* – "Let everything praise Allah that is in the heavens and the earth". These are records from the most authoritative of Islamic sources and they indicate very clearly that the Qur'an in its present form is somewhat incomplete.

SPECIFIC VERSES SAID TO BE MISSING FROM THE QUR'AN

Much is said in the Hadith literature about the missing verse about the "son of Adam". The tradition is so widely reported that it must be authentic in its basic details. As-Suyuti records a number of these to show how well-known it was, one of which reads:

Abu Waqid al-La'ithi said, "When the messenger of Allah (saw) received the revelation we would come to him and he would teach us what had been revealed. (I came) to him and he said 'It was suddenly communicated to me one day: Verily Allah says, We sent down wealth to maintain prayer and deeds of charity, and if the son of Adam had a valley he would leave it in search for another like it and, if he got another like it, he would press on for a third, and nothing would satisfy the stomach of the son of Adam but dust, yet Allah is relenting towards those who relent'." (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii 'Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.525)

This record is followed by a similar tradition recorded by Ubayy ibn Ka'b which gives the verse in much the same words, except that in this case the companion expressly stated that Muhammad had quoted this verse as part of the Qur'an text which he had been commanded to recite. Following this is the tradition of Abu Musa, similar to the record in the Sahih Muslim, which states that the verse was from a surah resembling Suratul-Bara'ah in length. In this case, however, Abu Musa is not said to have forgotten it but rather that it had subsequently been withdrawn (*thumma rafa'at* – "then it was taken away"), the verse on the greed of Adam alone being preserved (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan*, p.525).

Abu Ubaid in his work *Fadhail al-Qur'an* and Muhammad ibn Hazm in his *Kitab al-Nasikh wa'l Mansukh* both recorded this verse as well but alleged that it was part of a surah that was later abrogated and duly withdrawn. Nonetheless it remained in the memory of many reciters as a portion of the original Qur'an text.

Another very well-known passage said to be missing from the Qur'an relates to the "stoning verses" initially brought to the attention of the growing Muslim community by `Umar, the second Caliph of Islam. They state that Muhammad once ordered all adulterers to be stoned to death in contrast with the statement in Surah 24:2 that they should be lashed with a hundred strokes. `Umar is said to have drawn the attention of the Muslim community to this passage from the *mimbar* (pulpit) in the mosque of Medina towards the end of his life. He is reported to set the matter before those gathered before him as follows:

Allah sent Muhammad (saw) with the Truth and revealed the Holy Book to him, and among what Allah revealed, was the Verse of the Rajam (the stoning of married persons, male and female, who commit adultery) and we did recite this verse and understood and memorized it. Allah's Apostle (saw) did carry out the punishment of stoning and so did we after him. I am afraid that after a long time has passed, somebody will say, "By Allah, we do not find the verse of the Rajam in Allah's Book", and thus they will go astray by leaving an obligation which Allah has revealed. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.8, p.539)

`Umar was clearly persuaded that this verse was originally a part of the Qur'an as revealed to Muhammad and was concerned that over a period of time it would be forgotten by the next generation of Muslims. In another record of this incident it is said that `Umar added: "Verily stoning in the Book of God is a penalty laid on married men and women who commit adultery if proof stands, or pregnancy is clear, or confession is made" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulullah*, p.684). Both of these records add that `Umar mentioned another missing verse which was once part of the *kitabullah* (viz. the Qur'an) which the earliest of Muhammad's companions used to recite, namely "O people! Do not claim to be the offspring of other than your fathers, as it is disbelief on your part to be the offspring of other than your real father" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.8, p.540). There are indeed many Hadith records which record that Muhammad during his lifetime duly ordered the stoning of adulterers:

Ibn Shihab reported that a man in the time of the Apostle of Allah (saw) acknowledged having committed adultery and confessed it four times. The Apostle of Allah (saw) then ordered and he was stoned. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.350)

The difference between this tradition and the Qur'anic text quoted on giving adulterers a hundred stripes has led to much discussion among Muslim commentators. They generally concluded that, as `Umar had so much to say about the missing verse, it must have been part of the original text but had possibly been withdrawn. Nevertheless it was presumed that the teaching and prescription found in the verse remained binding as part of the *sunnah*, the "example" of the Prophet. They decided that stoning of adulterers was the penalty for married men and women who commit adultery but that a hundred lashes was the punishment for a single person who cohabited with a married person. In the early days Muslim scholars struggled with the implications of the many traditions which stated very clearly that certain passages were missing from the Qur'an.

Nonetheless `Umar was quite satisfied that the order to stone those guilty of adultery was indeed a part of the original text as appears from this particular tradition of the same incident:

See that you do not forget the verse about stoning and say: We do not find it in the Book of Allah; the Apostle of Allah (saw) had ordered stoning and we too have done so after him. By the Lord Who holds possession of my life, if people should not accuse me of adding to the Book of Allah, I would have transcribed therein: *Ash-shaikhu wash-shaikhatu ithaa zanayaa faarjumu humaa*. We have read this verse. (*Muwatta Imam Malik*, p.352)

These traditions, among many others of a similar nature, all give the impression that the Qur'an, once it was compiled into a single text at the end of Muhammad's life, was incomplete. Numerous passages, although not entirely forgotten by the companions of the Prophet, had nevertheless fallen out of the text of the book as it was generally recited by the Muslims and are no longer a part of it. While they do not appear to affect the teaching of the Qur'an as it stands today, they nevertheless do witness against its complete authenticity.

5. SAB`AT-I-AHRUF: THE SEVEN READINGS

THE SAB`AT-I-AHRUF IN THE HADITH LITERATURE

`Uthman succeeded in standardising a single written text of the Qur'an but, as the pronunciation of words and clauses was not reflected in the earliest manuscripts, the Qur'an was still read in different ways. No vocalisation of the written text existed at that time and so the script (as much of written Arabic does today) was transcribed with consonants only. Vowel points were only added much later. At the same time a tradition had been recorded that the Prophet himself had stated that the Qur'an was in fact sent down with more than one form of recitation:

The Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven different ways, so recite of it that which is easier for you. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.6, p.510)

This statement concludes an incident where `Umar one day heard Hisham ibn Hakim reciting *Suratul-Furqan* in a way very different to that which he had learnt it. In his typical impulsiveness he intended to spring upon him but controlled himself until Hisham had finished his reading. `Umar immediately confronted him with being a liar when he claimed that he had learned his recitation directly from Muhammad himself. When they approached the Prophet for a decision he confirmed both their readings, adding the above statement that the Qur'an had been revealed *alaa sab`ati ahruf*, "in seven readings". A similar tradition stating that the Qur'an was originally sent down in seven different forms reads as follows:

Ibn `Abbas reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Gabriel taught me to recite in one style. I replied to him and kept asking him to give more (styles), till he reached seven modes (of recitation). Ibn Shihab said: It has reached me that these seven styles are essentially one, not differing about what is permitted and what is forbidden. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.390)

Another tradition states that Ubayy ibn Ka'b recalled an occasion where Muhammad reported that *Jibril* (Gabriel) had one day informed him that Allah had commanded that the Qur'an be recited in only one dialect, to which Muhammad replied that his people were not capable of this. After some negotiation the angel informed him that Allah had allowed the Muslims to recite the Qur'an in seven different ways and that each one would be correct (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.2, p.391).

Apart from these traditions there are no records to define exactly what these seven different forms of reading were. As a result numerous different explanations have been given, some saying that this was to accommodate the different dialects of the Arab tribes and others that they were seven distinct forms conveyed to the centres of Islam by approved readers in the second century of Islam. Abu `Amr is said to have taken one of these to Basrah, Ibn Amir took another to Damascus, and so on (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, note 3365, Vol.3, p.1113). No one can possibly say what they were, however, as nothing more is said in the Hadith literature than that they were confined to differences in dialect and pronunciation.

It is important to note that these are a different type of variant reading to those which `Uthman suppressed. The records which have been kept of the latter were, as has been seen already, of words, clauses and other real differences in the text itself. In the case of the *sab`at-i-ahruf*, however, the distinction was confined to finer points of pronunciation and expression of the text. `Uthman was well aware of the different types and he obviously wanted to eliminate both of them. To erase the textual differences he simply chose Zaid's codex in preference to the others and ordered that they be burnt. To deal with the dialectal variants, on the other hand, he ordered Sa'id ibn al-As and two others from the Quraysh to amend Zaid's text where necessary to confine the text to their dialect. The following impression of his action is very informative:

He transcribed the texts (*suhuf*) into a single codex (*mushaf waahid*), he arranged the suras, and he restricted the dialect to the vernacular (*lugaat*) of the Quraysh on the plea that it (Qur'an) had been sent down in their tongue. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.140)

He succeeded eminently in eliminating the real differences in the text between the different codices by destroying all but one, but he was unable to eradicate the differences in dialect as these could not be defined in a written text that had no vowel points. It is these alone that the *sab`at-i-ahruf* are said to have affected. Muslim scholars and writers in modern times often attempt to blur the distinction by suggesting that the only variant readings that existed were in the pronunciation of different dialects (*lugaat*) and that, although `Uthman sought to suppress them, the Prophet of Islam himself had originally authorised them. It is obvious, however, that the prime purpose of the Caliph's action was to eliminate serious differences in the actual text of the Qur'an and that he could not, in fact, have succeeded in deleting the dialectal variations (which would have been negligible in comparison with the textual variants).

Abu Dawud records a selection of the latter type in his *Kitab al-Huruf wa al-Qira`at* ("The Book of Readings and Recitation"). These three examples show how the differences in pronunciation affected the text:

Shahr b. Hawshab said: I asked Umm Salamah: How did the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) read this verse: "For his conduct is unrighteous" (*innaha `amalun ghairu salih*)? She replied: He read it: "He acted unrighteously" (*innaha `amila ghaira salih*). (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1116)

Ibn al-Mussayab said: The Prophet (may peace be upon him), Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman used to read *maliki yawmi'l-din* ("Master of the Day of Judgment"). The first to read *maliki yawmi'l diin* was Marwan. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1119)

Shaqiq said: Ibn Mas`ud read the verse: "Now come thou" (*haita laka*). Then Shaqiq said: We read it, *hi`tu laka* ("I am prepared for thee"). Ibn Mas`ud said: I read it as I have been taught, it is dearer to me. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1120)

In each case the variant is found solely in the vowelings of the text and would not have been reflected in the consonantal text transcribed by `Uthman. It can clearly be seen that this type of variant reading has virtually no effect on the text or its meaning, unlike the other type which covers whole words and clauses found in some

codices and not in the others. It was to be some centuries before serious attention was given to actually defining the *sab`at-i-ahruf*, the "seven different readings".

THE PERIOD OF IKHTIYAR UNTIL IBN MUJAHID

For the next three centuries after `Uthman there were considerable differences in the recitation of the Qur'an as a result of his inability to eliminate the dialectal variants, but the differences were confined to these alone. This was a time of *ikhtiyar*, a period of "choice" when Muslims were free to read the Qur'an in whichever dialect they chose on the strength of the tradition that there were seven legitimate ways in which the Qur'an could be recited. During this period until the year 322 AH (934 AD), all scholars of the Qur'an agreed that such recitations were valid although no one could define exactly what the seven readings were. They would be at the discretion of anyone who attempted to specify them.

In that year, however, the well-known authority on the Qur'an at Baghdad, Ibn Mujahid, took it upon himself to resolve the issue. He had considerable influence with Ibn `Isa and Ibn Muqlah, two of the wazirs (ministers) in the Abassid government of the day. Through them he managed to establish an official limitation on the permissible readings of the Qur'an. He wrote a book titled *Al-Qira`at as-Sab`ah* ("The Seven Recitations") and in it he established seven of the readings current in the Muslim world as canonical and declared the others *shadhdh* ("isolated") and no longer legitimate. He gave no source of authority for his decision and it appears it was entirely his own discretion which guided him.

The seven readings now authorised were those of *Nafi* (Medina), *Ibn Kathir* (Mecca), *Ibn `Amir* (Damascus), *Abu `Amr* (Basrah), *Asim*, *Hamzah* and *al-Kisai* (Kufa). In each case there were certain recognised transmitters who had executed a recension (*riwayah*) of their own of each reading and two of these, those of Warsh (who revised Nafi's reading) and Hafs (who revised Asim's) eventually gained the ascendancy as the others generally fell into disuse. Warsh's *riwayah* has long been used in the *Maghrib* (the western part of Africa under Muslim rule, namely Morocco, Algeria, etc) mainly because it was closely associated with the Maliki school of law but it is the *riwayah* of Hafs that has gradually gained almost universal currency in the Muslim world. This has particularly been so since the printing of the Qur'an became commonplace.

Ibn Mujahid's determination to canonise only seven of the readings current in the Muslim world of his day was upheld by the Abbasid judiciary. Very soon after his decree a scholar named Ibn Miqdam was publicly forced to renounce the widely-held opinion that any reading of the basic consonantal outline was acceptable as long as it contained good Arabic grammar and made good sense. The period of *ikhtiyar* duly closed with Ibn Mujahid's action. He did to the vocalised reading of the Qur'an what `Uthman had done to the consonantal text many centuries earlier. Just as the Caliph had destroyed the different codices so this scholar outlawed all dialectal readings in use except seven. So likewise, just as the text standardised by `Uthman cannot be regarded as a perfect copy of the Qur'an exactly as it was delivered by Muhammad because it only standardised the text of one redactor at the Caliph's personal discretion, so the seven readings canonised by Ibn Mujahid cannot be accepted as an exact reflection of the *sab`at-i-ahruf* as they were likewise arbitrarily chosen by the redactor according to his own preference and judgment.

It is obvious that no one with any real authority can say precisely what the seven different readings referred to in the Hadith actually were. A very good example of the confusion caused in subsequent generations about these readings is found in the following quote attributed to Abu al-Khair ibn al-Jazari prior to Ibn Mujahid's declarations:

Every reading in accordance with Arabic, even if only remotely, and in accordance with one of the `Uthmanic codices, and even if only probable but with an acceptable chain of authorities, is an authentic reading which may not be disregarded, nor may it be denied, but it belongs to *al-ahruful-sab`at* (the seven readings) in which the Qur'an was sent down, and it is obligatory upon the people to accept it, irrespective of whether it is from the seven Imams, or from the ten, or yet other approved imams, but when it is not fully supported by these three (conditions), it is to be rejected as *dha`ifah* (weak) or *shaathah* (isolated) or *baatilah* (false), whether it derives from the seven or from one who is older than them. (As-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fii `Ulum al-Qur'an*, p.176)

This statement shows how impossible it was to define the seven different readings. Any good reading was automatically considered to be one of them, not because it could be proved to belong to them, but because of other factors – its *isnad* (chain of authorities), its consistency with the `Uthmanic consonantal text, and its compliance with proper Arabic grammar. The decision rested purely on matters of discretion.

Contrary to the oft-stated Muslim sentiment that the Qur'an as it stands today is an exact replica of the one said to be inscribed on the Preserved Tablet in heaven, it is obvious that the book went through a long period in which distinctions in both the actual text and thereafter in dialectal reading were eliminated in the interests of obtaining a single text. The Qur'an became *standardised* into the form in which it is found today, mainly through the actions of `Uthman and Ibn Mujahid respectively but also through other means such as the gradual lapse of most of the readings accepted by the latter scholar. The book only contains a uniform, defined text because certain Muslims of earlier times made it their express purpose to reduce it to a single text upon which the whole Muslim world could be united. The evidences show, however, that whole passages are now missing from certain surahs, that considerable numbers of variant readings existed in the original codices, and that a host of different dialectal readings survived until some three centuries later until these were reduced to seven. Only the printing of the Qur'an has finally given the Muslim world a single, unvaried text.

There is even evidence to show that some time after `Uthman's action to standardise the *mushaf*, the written text of the Qur'an, certain amendments were made to Zaid's text. Under the heading *Bab: Ma Ghaira al-Hajjaj fii Mushaf `Uthman* ("Chapter: What was Altered by al-Hajjaj in the `Uthmanic Text") Ibn Abi Dawud lists eleven changes made by the governor of Iraq during the caliphate of `Abd al-Malik many decades after the death of `Uthman. His narrative begins as follows:

Altogether al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf made eleven modifications in the reading of the `Uthmanic text. ... In al-Baqarah (Surah 2:259) it originally read *Lam yatasanna waandhur*, but it was altered to *Lam yatassanah* ... In al-Ma`ida (Surah 5:48) it read *Shar ya`atan wa minhaajaan* but it was altered to *shir `atawwa minhaajaan*. (Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.117)

The whole section continues to name each of the changes made by the governor in what appears to have been a further minor recension of the text. Interestingly each one of the readings amended was also originally the reading of Ubayy ibn Ka'b as well.

There can be little doubt that the Qur'an has generally survived intact and that its present text is a relatively authentic reproduction of the book as it was originally delivered. There is no justification, however, for the Muslim dogma that nothing in it, to the last dot or letter, has ever been changed or amended, or that any portion of it has since been lost or omitted.

6. THE EARLY SURVIVING QUR'AN MANUSCRIPTS

THE INITIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEXT

Numerous early manuscripts of the Qur'an from approximately one- hundred-and-fifty years after Muhammad's death have survived though none is in complete form. Large portions have been preserved intact but on the whole only fragments exist. It was generally assumed, as it is today, that the Arabic language was so familiar to its speakers that vowelling of the text was not necessary. A number of consonants were not distinguished from one another either so that only seventeen were employed in the very early texts. As time passed, however, the similar consonants were separated by diacritical points above or below the letters and vowelling soon followed to clearly identify the reading of each text. Today almost without exception printed Qur'ans are fully vocalised.

No form of dating appears in the earliest manuscripts either so that the date and place of origin of these texts is generally a matter of conjecture. It was only in later centuries that the calligrapher's name was disclosed in a colophon (usually at the end of a text) together with the date and place where the codex was transcribed. Unfortunately some colophons in the early manuscripts are known to have been forged so that accurate identification often becomes almost impossible.

Even after vocalisation became common some Qur'an manuscripts were transcribed in the original form. A good example is the superb text written in gold script on blue vellum which survives almost intact from Kairouan in Tunisia where it was originally inscribed in the late ninth or early tenth century AD. It has been suggested that the scribe's intention was to produce a work of great beauty for commemorative purposes rather than for general reading. This Qur'an was intended to be presented to the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mun for the tomb of his father, Harun ar-Rashid, at Mashad in Persia. For some reason it never left Tunis and the bulk of it is preserved in the National Library of Tunisia in the city. A number of individual leaves are in private collections.

The best indication of an early manuscript's origin, however, is its script. A number of different styles were used in the early days and these went through various stages of development. These factors help to determine the likely origin of any particular text. Prior to the advent of Islam the only proper script known to exist was the *Jazm* script. It had a very formal and angular character and it was from this style that the other famous early scripts developed. No Qur'an fragment, however, is known to have been written out in this form. The earliest Qur'an script known was employed in Arabia and is called the *al-Ma'il* script. It was first utilised in Medina. It is unique in that it uses vertical letters which are written at a slight angle. The very name means "the slanting" script and its upright form resulted in the early manuscripts being produced in a vertical format similar to that used for most books today. Only a few pages and fragments and, in a few cases, whole portions of the Qur'an are known to have survived yet they are almost certainly the oldest in existence. They date not earlier than about one hundred and fifty years after the death of Muhammad. A sign of their early origin is the fact that no vowel strokes or diacritical points were used in the text and no verse counts or chapter headings were recorded.

The second early script originating from Medina was the *Mashq*, the "extended" style which was used for a few centuries. It was the first to use a horizontal form and had a cursive and somewhat leisurely style. The most common early script, however, was the *Kufi*, more properly known as *al-Khatt al-Kufi*. Its title does not indicate its form but rather its place of origin, namely Kufa in Iraq where Ibn Mas'ud's codex had been so highly prized until its destruction at 'Uthman's direction. It took some time to become predominant but, when it did, it became pre-eminent for three centuries and many superb texts survive.

Like the *Mashq* script it employed a horizontal, extended style and as a result most of the codices compiled were oblong in format. In time it became supplemented with diacritical marks and vowel strokes. No Kufic Qur'ans are known to have been written in Mecca and Medina in the first two centuries when the *al-Ma'il* and *Mashq* scripts were most regularly used. Nonetheless most of the early surviving Qur'an texts are written in *Kufi* script.

Another script which derives from the Hijaz in Arabia is the *Naskh*, the "inspirational" script. It took some time before it became widely accepted but, when it did, it replaced virtually all the others including the *Kufi* as the standard form of transcribing the Qur'an. It remains so until this day and virtually all Qur'ans printed and written out by hand since the eleventh century are written in this form. It is easily readable and also yields readily to artistic calligraphy. One of the earliest Qur'ans to use this form which survives intact as a complete text is the famous manuscript written out by Ibn al-Bawwab at Baghdad in 1001 AD. It is now in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin in Ireland.

One other script amongst a few which developed after the *Naskhi* is the *Maghribi*, the "Western" script which, as its name indicates, comes from the extreme western region of the traditional Islamic world. It was first employed in Morocco and Moorish Spain and is still used in the area to this day. It is a very cursive script, not easy to read for those unfamiliar with the Arabic language, but highly attractive when written artistically.

THE TOPKAPI AND SAMARQAND CODICES

Despite the evidences that no Qur'an manuscripts can be reliably dated till the late eighth century, it is a popular fiction in the Muslim world that one or more of the copies of Zaid's codex that 'Uthman distributed to the Muslim provinces survives intact to the present day. The motive for this popular belief is the desire to prove from existing texts that the Qur'an is unchanged to its last letter from its first written codices down to its most recent copies.

It is known for certain that Zaid's original manuscript, which was originally in Abu Bakr's possession and thereafter under the control of `Umar and Hafsa, came into the hands of Marwan upon the latter's decease, having been sent to him by `Abdullah ibn `Umar. It is expressly stated that this manuscript was destroyed by him immediately thereafter (Ibn Abu Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*, p.21). Two of the early Kufic manuscripts surviving without vowel points, however, are especially presented as originals of the copies which `Uthman made from Zaid's codex, one being a codex said to be preserved in the State Library at Tashkent in Uzbekistan. It is popularly known as the "Samarqand" codex as it is said to have first come to this city about 1485 AD and to have remained there until 1868. Thereafter it was removed to St. Petersburg and in 1905 fifty facsimile editions were prepared by one Dr. Pissarref at the instigation of Czar Nicholas II under the title *Coran Coufique de Samarqand*, each copy being sent to a distinguished recipient. In 1917 it was taken to Tashkent where it now remains.

Not more than about a half of this manuscript survives. It only begins with the seventh verse of *Suratul-Baqarah* and many intervening pages are missing. The whole text from Surah 43:10 has been lost. What remains, however, indicates that it is obviously of great antiquity, being devoid of any kind of vocalisation although here and there a diacritical stroke has been added to a letter. Nonetheless it is clearly written in *Kufi* script which immediately places it beyond Arabia in origin and of a date not earlier than the late eighth century. No objective scholarship can trace such a text to Medina in the seventh century.

Its actual script is also very irregular. Some pages are neatly and uniformly copied out while others are distinctly untidy or imbalanced. On some pages the text is fairly smoothly spread out while on others it is severely cramped and condensed. At times the Arabic letter *kaf* is written uniformly with the rest of the text, at others it has been considerably extended and is the dominant letter. The manuscript may well be a composite text of portions from different original codices, alternatively different scribes were employed to transcribe it. It also has artistic illumination between some of the surahs with coloured medallions. The very appearance of the text compared with the known development of the early scripts prevents a date earlier than one hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death or a place of origin anywhere in Arabia.

The other famous manuscript is known as the "Topkapi" codex as it is preserved in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul in Turkey. Once again, however, it is written in *Kufi* script, giving its date away to not earlier than the late eighth century. Like the Samarqand codex it is written on parchment and is virtually devoid of vocalisation though it, too, has occasional ornamentation between the surahs. It also appears to be one of the earliest texts to have survived but it cannot sincerely be claimed that it is an `Uthmanic original.

A comparison between these two codices in any event shows that they were not transcribed in the same place at the same time. The Topkapi codex has eighteen lines to the page while the Samarqand codex has between eight and twelve. The whole text of the former is uniformly written and spaced while the latter, as mentioned already, is often haphazard and distorted. They may well both be two of the oldest sizeable manuscripts of the Qur'an surviving but their origin cannot be taken back earlier than the second century of Islam.

The oldest surviving texts of the Qur'an, whether in fragments or whole portions, date not earlier than about a hundred and fifty years after the Prophet's death.

English Translations of the Qur'an

Unlike the Bible authorised translations of the Qur'an into English, published by a number of recognised scholars, have never been produced. Virtually every English version has been the work of only one man, whether done by Muslim scribes or by Orientalists in the West. As a result each translation to some extent reflects the bias of the writer no matter how sincerely he may have attempted to produce a text as close to the Arabic original as he can. A brief outline of the most well-known works of both Muslim and Western scholars follows.

1. **Alexander Ross:** *The AlCoran of Mahomet.*

In 1649 the first English translation of the Qur'an appeared. It was published anonymously but it is presumed that its author was Alexander Ross who added an essay at the end of the book titled *A needfull Caveat or Admonition for them who desire to know what use may be made of, or if there be any danger in reading the Alcoran*. Two editions of this work appeared in London in its first year and a third was published in 1688. A further four editions appeared in the United States in the nineteenth century. It was not a direct translation from the Arabic text but was based on a French edition done two years earlier by André Du Ryer titled *L'Alcoran de Mahomet* and published in Paris.

The text is generally defective and as Ross had no knowledge of Arabic and only a limited knowledge of French, it sometimes misses the sense of the original altogether. Nonetheless it served to introduce the Qur'an to the English-speaking world and for nearly a century it was the only translation available. It also serves to indicate the attitudes towards Islam that prevailed in Europe at that time. The Qur'an is described as an "incongruous" book "farced with contradictions", a "hodg-podge" of lies, blasphemy and ridiculous fables. The author even went so far as to defend himself against those who might accuse him of allowing the "dismall night of Mahometane darkness" to enter England through his translation.

The book concludes with a brief biography of the life and death of the Prophet. Its title page includes a statement that it is "newly Englished" for the satisfaction of those who desire "to look into the Turkish vanities" and contains an acknowledgement of the French translation by Du Ryer.

2. George Sale: *The Koran*.

This was the first genuine English translation of the Arabic text and its first edition was published in London in 1734. It was supplemented with *Explanatory Notes, taken from the Most Approved Commentators, to which is prefixed, a Preliminary Discourse*. It has been reprinted in numerous editions over the centuries both in Europe and in America. The author not only had a sound knowledge of Arabic but was also very familiar with the commentary of Al-Baidawi and his translation regularly reflects the interpretation of the text by this and other early Muslim scholars of the Qur'an. As a result it is a remarkably accurate translation considering the paucity of Arabic grammars and dictionaries available at the time. Sale was also dependent to some extent, however, on a Latin translation done by Ludovico Marraccio titled *Alcorani Textus Universus* which was first published in 1698.

The Muslim world has generally disapproved of Sale's work, however, mainly it seems because of its critical evaluation of Muhammad and Islam in the preliminary essay and because Sale did not attempt to translate the text to suit Muslim sentiments as many Muslim translators have done. His notes at the bottom of each page also reflect adversely on Islam and the Qur'an at times. In 1882 a more comprehensive commentary of the text of Sale's Qur'an was published in four volumes titled *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Qur'an*, the additional material being supplied by E.M. Wherry.

3. Muhammad Ali: *The Holy Qur'an*.

This was the first translation of the Qur'an into English by a Muslim to become widely recognised even though it was done by a member of the moderate Lahore branch of the Ahmadiyya Movement, a sect outlawed from Islam in Pakistan in 1974. Muhammad Ali's first edition was published in Woking in England in 1917 and numerous reprints have followed.

It is similar to Wherry's extended version of Sale's work in that the text is supplemented with copious notes at the bottom of each page. Often these reflect the Ahmadiyya bias of the author where interpretations are offered of the meaning of specific texts. Although the Muslim world has held this translation in high esteem it has only been published by Ahmadiyya sources and, more recently, in America. It was the first to be published in interlinear form with the English text produced alongside the Arabic original and most reprints have followed this pattern.

4. Abdullah Yusuf Ali: *The Holy Qur'an*.

This translation was first published in Lahore in Pakistan in 1934. Like Muhammad Ali's it has usually been printed as an interlinear text together with the author's comprehensive notes at the foot of each page. It is not a good translation as Yusuf Ali has taken great liberties with the text. At times the text is a paraphrase or amplified expression of the original. Nonetheless it has become by far the most popular translation of the Qur'an into English in the Muslim world. It is widely republished every year. The script is written in a very leisurely and attractive style which probably accounts for its reputation, though it is not always easy to read. The author tends to make too much use of capital letters.

Although Yusuf Ali was a Shi'ite Muslim his work rarely shows any sectarian bias. There has been opposition to it from ultra-orthodox Muslims, however, who prefer the translation of Maulana Daryabadi titled *Holy Qur'an*, a work which sacrifices easy readability in the interests of obtaining a more accurate direct translation of the original. Yusuf Ali's notes, in fact, are more often an endeavour to give a spiritual understanding of the text rather than a formal interpretation of it. He was obviously a man of deep religious sincerity and his work, which appears destined to survive for a long time as the favourite of English-speaking Muslims, does have a freshness and liveliness not often found in Muslim translations.

5. **Arthur J. Arberry:** *The Koran Interpreted*.

This is probably the finest English translation of the Qur'an. It was first published in London in 1955. It combines what no other seems to achieve – a direct and accurate translation written in a striking style that simultaneously renders the spirit and temper of the Arabic original. The author has largely succeeded in impressing the rhythm and sharpness of the text on the hearer. People who have only read a Qur'an in English will

rarely be able to capture the impact the Arabic text makes on a Muslim, but this particular work goes a long way towards realising a vital feature of the book.

Other prominent English translations not covered in this appendix are mentioned in the Bibliography which follows.

The Crucifixion of Christ: A Fact, not Fiction

by John Gilchrist

THE CRUCIFIXION: FACT, NOT FICTION

1. [Did Jesus Plan an Attempted Coup?](#)
2. [The Image of Jesus in Deedat's Booklets](#)
3. [Did Jesus Defend Himself at His Trial?](#)
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The Crucifixion: Fact, not Fiction

The Bible is an anvil on which many hammers have been broken, yet its enemies never tire of attempting to make some impression on it. Ahmed Deedat of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban made little headway

with his booklet "Was Christ Crucified?" even though over a hundred thousand copies were eventually distributed, but instead of abandoning his project he has published a new attack on the Christian faith in the form of his booklet "Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?"

The whole theme of this publication is that Jesus was a man of weak temperament and character who plotted an unsuccessful coup in Jerusalem and who fortuitously survived the cross. This theory has no Biblical foundation and is contradicted by the Qur'an which teaches that Jesus was never put on a cross (Surah 4.157). It is promoted only by the Ahmadiyya cult of Pakistan which has been declared a non-Muslim minority sect. Only Deedat knows why he continues to espouse the cause of a discredited cult and why he advocates a theory that is anathema to true Christians and Muslims alike.

In this booklet we shall set forth a refutation of Deedat's publication, concentrating solely on the subject at hand without dealing with many issues in his treatise where he goes off at a tangent or writes purely rhetorically.

1. DID JESUS PLAN AN ATTEMPTED COUP?

Deedat constantly employs a theme in the early part of his booklet to the effect that Jesus planned a coup during his last week in Jerusalem which eventually had to be aborted. Under the heading 'An Aborted Coup' he says "... his high hopes did not materialise. The whole performance fizzled out like a damp squib..." (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?*, p. 10). It must come as a surprise to all Christians and Muslims to hear a new argument, first conceived nearly twenty centuries after the event, that Jesus was planning a political coup. For the one thing Jesus constantly avoided was any involvement in the politics of his day. He refused to be drawn into debates on the merits of paying taxes to the Roman oppressor (Luke 20. 19-26), withdrew from the crowds when they wanted to make him a political leader (John 6.15), and regularly taught his disciples not to be like those who sought political power (Luke 22.25-27).

The Jews did everything they could to convince Pilate, the Roman governor, that Jesus was advocating a revolt against Caesar (Luke 23.2) and yet even Deedat, in an unguarded moment, is constrained to admit that this charge "was absolutely false" (p.27). It is thus of great significance to find that even Deedat acknowledges that Jesus "did not look like a Zealot, a political agitator, a subversive person, a terrorist!" (p.27) and goes on to say in his booklet:

His was a spiritual kingdom, a ruler to rescue his nation from sin and formalism.
(*Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?*, p.27).

It is therefore all the more remarkable to find him attempting to prove elsewhere in his booklet that Jesus was indeed plotting a political coup to deliver the Jews from their overlords. His comments on page 27 of his booklet unwittingly pull the carpet right out from underneath his own thesis! He admits that Jesus was not planning a revolution.

The theory is in any event absurd as appears from an analysis of some of Deedat's arguments in its favour and we shall briefly consider these to prove the point. We begin with his treatment of Jesus' statement just before his arrest that those of his disciples who had no sword should sell their garments and buy one (Luke 22.36). He interprets this to mean that Jesus was calling them to arms and to prepare for a jihad a "holy" war, whatever that might be. What followed on this statement of Jesus is of great significance. His disciples said:

"Look, Lord, here are two swords". And he said to them, "It is enough".
Luke 22.38

Two swords would hardly be "enough" to stage a revolution and it is obvious that Jesus meant "enough of that", that is, your misunderstanding of what I am saying. Nevertheless, because he is trying to convince his readers that Jesus was planning a coup, he is at pains to argue that two swords would have been enough to overthrow the whole Jewish hierarchy in Israel and immediately thereafter their Roman overlords! As is to be expected, his argument is hardly persuasive. He resorts to further flights of fancy in suggesting that Jesus' disciples were "armed with sticks and stones" (p.13) like some riotous mob. There is not a shred of evidence in the Bible to

support this claim, raised by Deedat purely to try and mitigate the strange anomaly that Jesus would consider two swords sufficient to stage a major revolt! At another place Deedat says:

The disciples of Jesus **always** misunderstood him.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-fiction?, p.23).

The word "always" is in bold print in this quote in his booklet. Once again Deedat has unwittingly contradicted himself for, if Jesus intended that his disciples should arm themselves to the hilt as Deedat suggests, then his disciples understood him perfectly, for this is precisely what they took his statement to mean. But he is right in saying that the disciples regularly misunderstood him - here as much as at any other time. We need to consider what Jesus said just after saying that they should purchase swords to get a better understanding of this matter. He said:

"For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressors'; for what is written about me has its fulfillment".

Luke 22.37

The scripture he quotes is from Isaiah 53, a prophetic chapter written about seven hundred years beforehand in which the prophet Isaiah foresaw the suffering of the Messiah on behalf of his people in which he would make himself an offering for sin (Isaiah 53.10). The whole verse from which Jesus quoted reads as follows:

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53.12

Jesus plainly stated that this prophecy was about to be fulfilled in him and its meaning is abundantly clear. He would "pour out his soul to death" the following day on the cross and would be "numbered with the transgressors" (he was duly crucified between two thieves - Luke 23.33). Yet he would "bear the sin of many" as he atoned for the sins of the world on the cross and would "make intercession for the transgressors" (he prayed for his murderers from the cross - Luke 23.34). Because of this gracious work God would grant him to "see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53.11) and would give him "the spoil" of his victory - a clear prediction of his resurrection.

Deedat ignores the full statement of Jesus because it contradicts his purpose, but it is surely clear that Jesus was anticipating his crucifixion, death and resurrection as the Saviour of the world and was not planning a coup as if he were a common upstart. The imminent events would take Jesus away from his disciples, and his exhortations to buy purses, bags and swords was a colloquial way of advising them to prepare to earn their own living once he had gone.

Central to Deedat's theme of an abortive coup is the argument that the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem a week earlier among a crowd of disciples hailing him as the Messiah was a march on Jerusalem. He uses these exact words when he says:

The march on Jerusalem had fizzled out.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p.21).

Under the heading 'March into Jerusalem' Deedat acknowledges that Jesus expressly rode into the city seated on a donkey. Surely this was a most unlikely vehicle of conveyance for a coup Jesus clearly chose it because donkeys symbolise peace and docility, and he wished to show Jerusalem that he was coming in peace and was fulfilling this promise of God recorded in another prophecy centuries earlier:

Rejoice, greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass.

Zechariah 9.9

He came in humility and peace on a beast which symbolised his purpose. "He shall command peace to the nations", the prophecy continues (Zechariah 9.10). It is grossly absurd to suggest that Jesus was heading a "march" or that he was instigating a violent "armed struggle" as people would say today.

Deedat conveniently overlooks the fact that just as Jesus was about to be arrested the same night his disciples cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22.49). One of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear, but Jesus immediately rebuked him and healed the man who had been injured. All the evidence shows that he was not planning a destructive coup at all but was preparing for the supreme gesture of love he was to exhibit to the world in his pending suffering and death on the cross for the sins of men. In the same book quoted above we read that God once promised:

"I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day".

Zechariah 3.9

That day had just arrived, and Jesus was making himself ready to "secure an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9.12) by taking away the sins of the world on that fateful Friday for which he had come.

The theory that Jesus was planning an abortive coup is a gross injury to his gracious dignity and a shocking caricature which one does not expect from a man who is supposed to believe that Jesus was one of the greatest men who ever lived.

Deedat has never done military training and his ignorance in this field is exposed on page 14 of his booklet where he suggests that Jesus took Peter, James and John with him into the Garden of Gethsemane as an inner line of defence with eight more guarding the gate. He boldly suggests that this was a masterly tactic "that would bring credit to any officer out of 'Sandhurst'", a "leading military academy in England" (p.14). A former officer in the British Army once commented on this claim by saying to me 'that he had never heard such things taught at Sandhurst! Deedat says of the eight disciples that Jesus left at the gate:

He positions them strategically at the entrance to the courtyard; armed to the hilt, as the circumstances would allow.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p.14).

He goes on to say that he took Peter, James and John, "these zealous Zealots (the fighting Irishmen of their day)" (p.14), to prepare his inner defense. This argument flounders on closer analysis. Peter, James and John were peaceable fishermen from Galilee (Jesus had only one Zealot among his disciples and 5 it was none of these three - Luke 6.15) and they were his closer circle of disciples throughout his Ministry. On the occasion of his transfiguration these same disciples alone went up the mountain with him while the rest mingled with the crowds below (Matthew 17.1, 14-16). Likewise, when he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, he again took the same three disciples with him into the house (Luke 8.51). He often took these three disciples, Peter, James and John, into his closest confidence on appropriate occasions and this shows clearly that Jesus was not planning a masterly defence in Gethsemane when he took them with him into the inner part of the garden. Rather, he was once again seeking their close fellowship on yet another of those important occasions when he desired only the intimate companionship of his closest disciples. All this shows quite conclusively that there is no substance in the argument that Jesus was planning a coup.

2. THE IMAGE OF JESUS IN DEEDAT'S BOOKLET.

One of the strangest things about Deedat's booklet is the caricature he presents of the person of Jesus Christ. Strange, indeed, because Muslims are supposed to honour Jesus as the Messiah and as one of the greatest of God's prophets. One or two statements in his booklet are considerably offensive to Christians and must surely injure sincere Muslims who have learnt to respect Jesus as a man of honour and dignity. It is hardly surprising that Deedat's booklet was at one time declared "undesirable" by the Director of Publications in South Africa (early in 1985). In one place he says:

Jesus had failed to heed the warning of the Pharisees to curb the over exuberance of his disciples (Luke 19.39). He had miscalculated. Now he must pay the price of failure.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p.10).

On another page he says that "Jesus had doubly miscalculated" (p.19) in that he thought he could rely on his disciples to defend him and that he would only have to deal with Jews. As if such allegations were not sufficient

to defame Jesus, he goes on to speak of the "hot and cold blowings of Jesus" and fills up the measure of his slanders in saying:

It can be claimed with justification that Jesus Christ (pbuh) was the "Most unfortunate of all God's Messengers".

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p.23).

We are sure that even Muslims must find such statements extremely offensive. Christians do not hesitate to regard them as blasphemous. Nevertheless it is not our desire to express emotional indignation but to show how fatuous Deedat's claims are.

It requires only a cursory analysis of those last hours in the life of Jesus before his crucifixion to see that there can be no substance at all in the claim that Jesus had "miscalculated" or ever blew "hot and cold". For the one thing that characterises everything Jesus said on the last night he was with his disciples was a total awareness of all that was to befall him and his willingness to undergo it.

He knew that Judas Iscariot would betray him (Mark 14.18 - he had known this for a long time in fact as appears from John 6.64) and that Peter would deny him three times (Matthew 26.34). He predicted that he would be apprehended and that all his disciples would desert him (Mark 14.27). We just cannot find any ground at all for Deedat's claim that Jesus hoped his disciples would fight for him and that he had "miscalculated". For these passages show quite plainly that Jesus had calculated exactly what was going to happen, for his disciples all did precisely what he said they would do.

He constantly told them that last fateful night that he was about to be parted from them (John 13.33, 14.3, 14.28, 16.5) and that they should not lose heart for his sufferings would be entirely in accordance with all that had been predicted in the prophecies of the former prophets (Luke 22.22). When the Jews finally came to arrest him, far from preparing any kind of defence, he walked straight into their hands. We read:

Then Jesus, knowing all that was to befall him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth". Jesus said to them, "I am he". Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.

John 18.4-5

Jesus came forward, knowing all that was to befall him. He knew that he was about to be crucified and killed, but that he would rise on the third day, as he had so often predicted in plain language (Matthew 17.22-23, 20.19, Luke 9.22, 18.31-33). In fact there was no need of a showdown with the Jews at all. If Jesus had wanted to avoid arrest, all he needed to do was to leave Jerusalem. Instead he went to the very place where he knew that Judas Iscariot would lead the Jews to look for him (John 18.2) and when they came, he voluntarily gave himself over to them. Furthermore he hardly needed the valiant efforts of eleven disciples to defend him for he plainly testified that he could have called on twelve legions of angels to help him if he had so wished (Matthew 26.53). Just one angel had the power to destroy whole cities and armies (2 Samuel 24.16, 2 Kings 19.35) and one shudders to think what twelve legions of angels could have done to protect him.

There is just simply no substance in Deedat's claim that Jesus was plotting and scheming and became a failure through his miscalculations. On the contrary it is quite remarkable to see how he knew precisely what was to happen to him. Far from being a "failure", he became the most successful man who ever lived the only man who has ever raised himself from the dead to eternal life and glory. Muhammad failed to conquer death and it brought his life to nothing in Medina in 632 AD and holds him to this day in its grip. Jesus, however, succeeded where Muhammad had failed. He is "our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1.10). He triumphed over death and ascended into heaven where he ever lives and reigns. So much for Deedat's insult that he was supposed to be the "most unfortunate" of all God's messengers. The truth is that he was the greatest man who ever lived.

It has become apparent, and will become more so as we proceed, that Deedat's booklet is nothing but a distortion of the Scriptures. He perverts the meaning of texts which he feels can be tortured into serving his purpose and simply suppresses others which refute his theories completely.

3. DID JESUS DEFEND HIMSELF AT HIS TRIAL?

On page 28 of his booklet Deedat attempts to discredit the Gospel records of Jesus' crucifixion further by contesting a prophecy in Isaiah 53.7 which predicted that he would not open his mouth in his defence at his trial but would be led to the cross "as a sheep before its shearers is dumb". It is quite clear from the prophecy that this did not mean that Jesus would say nothing at all once he was arrested but rather that he would not venture to defend himself before his accusers. Deedat's whole argument depends on certain statements made by Jesus which he attempts to draw out as defences made against his accusers.

He attempts to ridicule Jesus by asking whether he spoke "with his mouth closed" when he told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18.36), when he called on one of the officers of the High Priest to testify of anything he had said wrongly (John 18.23), and when he prayed to God that, if possible, the cup of suffering he faced might be taken away from him (Matthew 26.39).

It needs to be pointed out that NONE of these statements was made by Jesus during his public trials before the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas the high priest, or before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The first statement was made to Pilate during private conversation in the praetorium; the second was made during Jesus' appearance before Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, which was not during his trial before the Sanhedrin as Deedat wrongly suggests (p.28) - the trial only took place after this event in the house of Caiaphas as the Gospels clearly show (John 18.24, Matthew 26.57); and the third was made in the Garden of Gethsemane before Jesus was even arrested. The evidence brought forth by Deedat is therefore totally irrelevant to the point and he proves nothing at all. What does concern us is whether Jesus defended himself either before the Sanhedrin in Caiaphas' house or during his public trial before Pilate. It does not surprise us to find that Deedat overlooks what the Gospels plainly have to say about these two official trials. After hearing the evidence against Jesus before the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas put Jesus on terms to answer his accusers and what transpired is of great importance:

And the high priest stood up and said, "Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?" But Jesus was silent.

Matthew 26.62-63

Instead of defending himself he promptly testified, in answer to the next question, that he was indeed the Son of God - a testimony that prompted the Sanhedrin to sentence him to death. The important point is that, in answer to his accusers, we read plainly that Jesus was silent. Likewise we read that when Pilate put much the same question to him the same thing transpired. He did not open his mouth to say anything in his own defence.

But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor wondered greatly.

Matthew 27.12-14

Deedat subtly conceals these incidents which tell us plainly that Jesus was silent before the Sanhedrin when accused by the false witnesses that had been put forward, and that he made no answer not even to a single charge - when accused before Pilate. In his traditional fashion Deedat suppresses the evidences that relate directly to the subject at hand and instead tries to draw arguments from other occasions not relevant to the issues.

It is also interesting to find that exactly the same thing happened when Jesus appeared before Herod, the Jewish king, before being sent back to Pilate.

When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him.

Luke 23.8-10

Once again, when Jesus was accused, he made no answer. On every occasion when he was actually on trial before the Sanhedrin, Herod or Pilate, he said absolutely nothing in his own defence and so fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that he would not defend himself at his trial by opening his mouth to speak on his own behalf.

None of the statements quoted by Deedat was made while Jesus was actually on trial and so yet another of his arguments falls entirely to the ground.

4. THE THEORY THAT JESUS SURVIVED THE CROSS.

We have never ceased to wonder why Ahmed Deedat continues to promote the theory that Jesus was indeed crucified but came down alive from the cross. Our amazement arises from two considerations. On the one hand, this idea is held to only by the heretical Ahmadiyya sect in Islam and is denounced by all true Christians and Muslims. On the other hand, this theory has been refuted time and again and, whereas Deedat continues to promote it, he can offer no reply to the arguments produced against it.

For example, on page 36 of his new booklet, he claims that when the centurion watching over Jesus on the cross "saw that he was dead already" (John 19.33), this means purely that he "surmised" that Jesus had died and that there was nothing to verify his death. In a reply to his earlier booklet 'Was Christ Crucified?', I showed quite plainly that the centurion's observation was the best possible evidence that Jesus was already dead. The centurion had to confirm before the Roman governor that the crucified man was already dead and, if he was wrong, his own life was likely to be forfeited. We read:

And Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he was already dead. And when he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph.

Mark 15.44-45

The Roman governor Pilate knew that if the centurion confirmed his death, then it was sure, for in those days any soldier who allowed a prisoner to escape would lose his own life in consequence.

When the Apostle Peter escaped from prison some time later in the city, the sentries appointed to guard him were summarily executed (Acts 12.19). Again, when another jailer supposed that Paul and Silas had escaped from prison as well, "he drew his sword and was about to kill himself" (Acts 16.27), until he discovered they had not. He preferred to die by suicide than by execution. Death was the penalty for allowing prisoners to escape - what then could the centurion expect if a man condemned to death had escaped because he had made some careless and negligent observations? No one but the centurion could have been such a reliable witness to the death of Jesus on the cross!

Although an emphatic refutation of Deedat's assumption that the soldiers only "surmised" that Jesus was dead has thus been given, Deedat continues to promote the same old argument. He casually overlooks the conclusive evidence against his theory and just simply reproduces it. It is a poor advocate who can only repeat his original arguments once these have been thoroughly disproved by his opponent.

Not only did the centurion observe very conclusively that Jesus was dead but one of the soldiers thrust a spear into his side - an act calculated to ensure his death. One of the common Roman methods of killing people was to "put them to the sword", that is, to thrust them through. This is precisely what the soldier did to Jesus and, even if he had been in perfect health, he could never have survived such a blow. Yet Deedat ridiculously suggests that this death-dealing blow "came to the rescue" of Jesus and helped to revive him by stirring up his blood so that "the circulation could regain its rhythm" (p. 39). Surely not even the most gullible of his readers will believe such absolute nonsense - that a death-blow, a spear-thrust through his body, could help to revive him! When one has to resort to such absurdities, it is clear that there is no merit in the argument.

A similar absurdity is set before the reader a few pages on in Deedat's booklet where he is discussing the occasion when Mary Magdalene came to anoint the body of Jesus shortly after his crucifixion:

In 3 days time, the body would be fermenting from within - the body cells would be breaking up and decomposing. If anybody rubs such a decaying body, it will fall to pieces.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p.44).

This, too, is sheer scientific nonsense. Jesus had died late on the Friday afternoon and it was only a day and two nights later, as Deedat admits on the same page, that Mary Magdalene came to anoint his body. No body will

"fall to pieces" within such a short period. In bold letters Deedat adds that Mary came alone to the tomb to supposedly help Jesus recover, yet in Matthew 28.1 and Luke 24.10 we discover that she was accompanied by at least two other women, Joanna and Mary the mother of James, and that only to bring spices which they had prepared according to the burial custom of the Jews. There is just no substance in Deedat's arguments. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus are facts of history - the only fiction is his theory that Jesus supposedly survived the cross and recovered.

We do not propose to go into the moving of the stone, whether Jesus tried to show his disciples that he was not yet dead, or the subject of the Sign of Jonah. Although all these subjects are treated in Deedat's booklet, we have given a thorough answer to them in the second booklet in this series entitled "What Indeed was the Sign of Jonah?" which readers may obtain from our Fellowship free of charge.

Another argument once again repeated by Deedat that has often been refuted is his suggestion that Jesus was reluctant to die. In refutations of his previous booklet on the subject of the crucifixion I have shown clearly that Jesus was only reluctant to be forsaken by his Father and be abandoned to the realm of sin and the wickedness of sinful men. This fear reached its pitch in the Garden the night before Jesus was crucified when the hour had come for him to be handed over to sinful men (Matthew 26.45). Had he been reluctant to die, this fear would only have reached its climax as he faced the cross the next day but, after he had been strengthened the night before by an angel who ministered to him (Luke 22.43), he faced death with remarkable fortitude. He calmly walked forward, knowing all that was to befall him, as we have seen. He walked right into a course that he knew must lead to his crucifixion and death.

He calmly took all the injuries heaped on him the following day and without any sign of fear or protest gave himself over to be crucified. As he was taken out of Jerusalem he showed more concern for the women of the city and their children than for himself (Luke 23.28) and on the cross cared only for those around him and not for himself (John 19.26-27). Indeed, instead of finding that he was reluctant to die, we discover in the Gospel narratives that he set his face towards the cross and, although he had many opportunities to avoid it, he did not seize them but went on, determined to redeem men from their sins.

Yet another of Deedat's arguments thus comes to nothing. We find him in considerable confusion in another place when he says:

For God Almighty will never allow His truly "anointed one" (Christ) to be killed -
(Deuteronomy 18.20).
(Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, p. 15).

There is no substance in the suggestion that God would not allow his anointed one to be killed for there was a specific prediction in the prophecy of the great prophet Daniel that the "anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing" (Daniel 9.26). It is in fact from the very use of the word messiah in this text that the Jews came to call the awaited Saviour of the world the "Messiah", and yet it is right in this text that we read that this very Messiah would be cut off - a clear prediction of the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

We are particularly intrigued to find that Deedat quotes Deuteronomy 18.20 as a reference to the coming "anointed one", the "Christ", the Messiah, namely Jesus. In his booklet "What the Bible Says About Mohammed" he labours to prove that the prophecy of a coming prophet in Deuteronomy 18 is a reference to Muhammad, even though we have proved again and again that it was an anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, namely Jesus. (The Qur'an confirms that the only Messiah, the only "anointed one", al-Masih, was Jesus - Surah 3.45). It is therefore most significant to find Deedat making one of his occasional slips and conceding in the above quote from his booklet that the prophecy relates to Jesus, the Messiah, and not to Muhammad.

Perhaps the most absurd argument in the whole of Deedat's booklet is his suggestion that God, in hearing Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, sent his angel to strengthen him "in the hope that God will save him" (p.35). He goes on to argue that God especially put it into the minds of the soldiers that Jesus was already dead on the cross and says this was "another step in God's plan of rescue" (p.36). The argument, thus, is that after hours of scourging, beating, having thorns pressed into his head, being forced to carry his cross, being crucified,

succumbing into unconsciousness in exhaustion at the point of death after hours of indescribable agony, and enduring an awful sword thrust, God wonderfully stepped in to "save" him by fooling everybody into thinking that Jesus was already dead when he was really only at the point of death.

One struggles to find any logical progression of thought in this line of reasoning. If it was God's intention to "save" Jesus, surely he would have taken him away immediately, as the overwhelming majority of Muslims believe. What sort of "comfort" or "strengthening" could the angel have given if God's hand was only to be revealed after hours of indescribable agony and torture to the point of death on the cross?

Firstly, such pain and suffering would have been unnecessary and God's deliverance brought about only after a tragic delay. Secondly, it could have been no comfort to Jesus to know that he faced the horrors of crucifixion only to be delivered at the point of death. Furthermore, if Jesus was taken down alive from the cross purely because he was so close to death that all thought he was already dead, we cannot see how God "saved" him or even where he intervened. This would have been nothing more than an accident caused by an illusion.

The whole argument is obviously strained against the logical progression of the events in the Gospels. The truth of the whole matter is that Jesus was physically at the breaking point in contemplating suffering for sin. He had just told his disciples that he was "exceedingly sorrowful - even unto death" (Mark 14.34). God heard the prayer of Jesus and the angel gave him strength to proceed and endure the cross and death and so fulfil his mission to redeem sinners from sin, death and hell.

To save Jesus from dying while at the point of death after hours of agony on the cross would have been an untimely and senselessly delayed deliverance accompanied by a lengthy period of painful recovery from the horrific ordeal. To save him from death by raising him in glory and perfect health is sensible, logical, and is in fact the genuine Biblical accent of the crucifixion.

We press on to Deedat's argument that Jesus disguised himself after surviving the cross so that no one would recognize him, calling this "a perfect masquerade!" (p 49). He suggests that when Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus the day he walked out of the tomb alive (Luke 24.15) he concealed his identity until he revealed it in breaking bread before them, and then went away. This is nothing but an attempt to water down the incident in the Bible which has a far more dramatic element. It will be useful to quote exactly what happened:

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?"

Luke 24.30-32

The drama here unfolds rapidly. Suddenly their eyes are opened and he vanishes out of their sight! If we look carefully at this passage we can see what really happened when they recognised Jesus.

The Bible states that after his resurrection his body bore the nature that all the righteous will bear in heaven. He was able to transcend all earthly limitations and could appear or vanish at will. He could suddenly appear in a locked room (John 20.19) and could conceal or reveal himself at will.

So here, it was not Jesus who removed a "disguise". The text plainly says "THEIR eyes were opened". Suddenly THEY were able to perceive who he was. So likewise we read that the risen Jesus, in his eternal body, was not only able to open men's eyes to perceive his true identity but could even open their minds to perceive the meaning of God's revealed Word (Luke 24.45).

Just as he suddenly appeared in the room (Luke 24.36), so he equally suddenly vanished out of their sight. The dramatic character of the narratives in Luke 24 cannot be explained away in rationalistic terms. The thrust of this whole chapter is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (cf. 24.46) and it was this remarkable event that led to such dramatic incidents

The whole theme of the narratives in the Gospels is the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus. It requires a good deal of word-twisting to argue otherwise. An example is Deedat's suggestion that Jesus was laid in a "big, roomy chamber" (p.79) All the Gospels teach plainly that this was nothing but a tomb which had been especially hewn out of a rock by Joseph of Arimathea as his own burialplace. In Matthew 27.60 we read that Joseph took Jesus' body and "laid it in his own new tomb" (so also Mark 15.46, Luke 23.53). In John 19.41-42 it is twice said Jesus was laid in a TOMB and bound according to the BURIAL-CUSTOM of the Jews Deedat's attempts to torture these accounts of a funeral into his own speculation that Jesus was placed in a "big roomy camber" so that he might "recover" are a self evident proof that there is no substance in his argument at all.

Lastly we shall consider his four statements on page 50 of his booklet where he points out that many people testified on the day of resurrection that he was ALIVE. The word is placed in capital letters, is underlined, and is accompanied by an exclamation mark in each case. This purports to be an argument favouring his theory that Jesus had not died on the cross but was still alive. We marvel at such reasoning for the whole point of the resurrection from the dead, as set out in the Gospels, is this very fact - that Jesus was raised ALIVE from the dead. What, then, is Deedat trying to prove? The testimonies that Jesus was alive are central to the whole Christian belief that Jesus had risen from the dead after being killed on the cross.

In his quote from Luke 24.4-5, Deedat only quotes the words of the angels to Mary and the other women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" He significantly omits these words which follow:

"Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and on the third day rise".

Luke 24.6-7

In these words we clearly find the angels speaking of Jesus being CRUCIFIED and RISING ON THE THIRD DAY. Clearly they proclaimed that he was alive because he had duly RISEN FROM THE DEAD. Much the same was said by the brethren at Jerusalem to the disciples from Emmaus:

"The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to of Simon".

Luke 24.34

The united testimony of all was that Jesus was alive because he was RISEN INDEED. "He has risen" (Mark 16.6) was the universal testimony that day. He had come alive from the dead and had conquered all the power of death. He had made it possible for men to be raised with him to newness of life (Romans 6.4) and to rise with him to eternal life in victory over death and sin (1 Corinthians 15. 55-57). He had fulfilled his own declaration:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die".

John 11.25

Deedat's whole argument is a pitiful caricature of the glorious event described in the Gospels. Our brief treatment of his argument that Jesus came down alive from the cross and somehow recovered proves conclusively that there is nothing at all in what he says. The misleading arguments he presents lead us to conclude that he fails to prove his cruci-"fiction" theory because he comes from an "improper"-gation Centre!

5. WILD STATEMENTS IN DEEDAT'S BOOKLET

One of the things that struck me again and again as I read through Deedat's booklets was his unrestrained tendency to make wild statements devoid of good sense and authority. It seems he trades on Muslim ignorance of the Bible and simply hopes his readers will accept without question whatever he says. He surely cannot be endeavouring to convince Christian readers who know their Bible well and who can only marvel at his presumptuousness. To begin with, he says in his booklet:

From the "call to arms" in the upper-room, and the masterful deployment of forces at Gethsemane and the blood-sweating prayer to the God of Mercy for help, it appears that Jesus knew nothing about the contract for his crucifixion.

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p. 16)

The last statement, to the effect that Jesus knew nothing about his crucifixion is a fallacy set forth in bare defiance of overwhelming facts to the contrary. Time and again Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified, killed, and rise again on the third day in statements like these:

"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised".

Luke 9.22

"Behold we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day".

Matthew 20.18-19

When he was duly raised from the dead he rebuked his disciples for not believing all that he had told them as well as the prophecies of the former prophets that he would be killed and rise on the third day (Luke 24.25-26,46). On numerous other occasions he made it plain that this was the whole purpose of his coming to earth. He told them he had come to lay down his life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20.28), that his body would be broken and his blood shed for the forgiveness of their sins (Matthew 26.26-28), that he would give up his life that the world might live (John 6.51), and that he had power to lay down his life and power to take it again (John 10.18). It is surely absurd to suggest that Jesus knew nothing about his pending crucifixion. On the contrary, as he faced this climactic moment on his life when, as the Saviour of the world, he would redeem mankind and pave the way for many to enter eternal life, he proclaimed "I have come for this hour" (John 12.27). So aware was he of the fateful climax that awaited him that he constantly referred to it as "my hour" (John 2.4) and "my time" (John 7.6). Of no other man was it more truly said, "cometh the hour, cometh the man". The hour for the salvation of the world had come, and God had sent the only man who could achieve it, Jesus Christ.

Deedat makes a similar loose statement when he says that the title "Son of God" in the Bible "is also another harmless expression in Jewish theology" (p.25). On the contrary, just as Muslims hold to an austere unitarianism which does not allow that it is possible for God to have a Son, so the Jews of that time and to this day reject the concept completely. When the high priest asked Jesus if he was the Son of God, as he had been reported as making such a claim, Jesus answered, "I am" (Mark 14.62). If this was a "harmless expression" as Deedat claims, the high priest would hardly have taken exception to it, but he immediately cried out "he has uttered blasphemy" (Matthew 26.65). When Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Jews cried out:

"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God".

John 19.7

Muslims to this day attempt to avoid this issue and allege that Christians have turned the prophet Jesus into the Son of God. But the Jews could hardly foist this claim on his followers when Jesus himself made this very confession before them. "He has made himself the Son of God", they cried, and this was why they condemned Jesus for blasphemy. Through his resurrection, however, God gave assurance to all men that Jesus was indeed his own beloved Son just as he had claimed (Romans 1.4).

Deedat makes a similar outlandish claim when he says that "any Christian scholar will confirm" that the Gospels were only written anything up to a number of centuries after the time of Jesus. It has been generally accepted among all good Biblical scholars that the synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) were all written about 55-60 AD (less than thirty years after Jesus' resurrection) and the Gospel of John up to 70 AD. Only the most prejudiced "scholars" could suggest otherwise, and even hostile Critics have accepted these dates. How could the Gospels have been written centuries later when manuscript fragments dating as early as 120 AD still exist and quotes from the Gospels are found in the writings of the early Christians in the generation immediately succeeding the apostolic age?

Deedat makes a most unfortunate statement when he says in another place "Salvation is cheap in Christianity" (p.61). We doubt whether Muslims will consider Abraham's willingness to offer his son to God a "cheap" sacrifice. Surely, then, there can be nothing cheap in the willingness of God to give his own Son as a sacrifice for our sins. The Bible tells Christians plainly, "you were bought with a price" (Corinthians 6.20) - what a price! - and the apostle can only speak in consequence of God's "inexpressible gift" (2 Corinthians 9.15). There is no

way to possibly evaluate the price that was paid to save men from sin, death and hell. Salvation in Christianity is the most expensive thing this world has ever seen - the life of the only Son of the eternal God. In the same way no man can obtain this salvation unless he commits his whole life to God through faith in his Son, and surrenders his whole personality and character to his will.

Lastly, in one of his typically inaccurate charges, Deedat claims that the story of the appearance of Jesus to his doubting disciple Thomas, as recorded in John 20.24-29, is a "flagrant 'gospel fabrication'" (p.31), and has the temerity to claim further:

Biblical scholars are coming to the conclusion that the "doubting Thomas" episode is of the same variety as that of the woman "caught in the act" - (John 8. 1-11), i.e., it is a fabrication!

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p. 76).

Most significantly Deedat does not tell us who these so-called "Biblical scholars" are. There is not a shred of evidence anywhere to back up the claim that the story of Thomas's unwillingness to believe in the risen Christ until he had seen him and his declaration on duly seeing him that he was his Lord and his God, is a "fabrication". The story is found extant in all the earliest manuscripts available to us without any variance in reading, and the evidences therefore are unanimously in favour of its authenticity. There is no support whatsoever for the speculation that this story may have been invented.

Deedat seems to base his claim on the assumption that Jesus was not nailed to the cross but only tied with ropes. He makes another really wild statement when he says "contrary to common belief, Jesus was not nailed to the cross" (p.31). Archaeological discoveries in the land of Palestine have confirmed that Romans crucified victims by nailing them to their crosses (a skeleton was found with a nail through both feet in recent years). Furthermore it is the universal testimony of the prophecies to and historical records of Jesus' crucifixion that he was nailed to his cross (Psalm 22.16, John 20.25, Colossians 2.14). Deedat's argument is not only "contrary to common belief" as he admits, but, like so many of his points, is also contrary to the Scriptures, contrary to reliable historical records, contrary to archaeological discoveries, contrary to the evidences, and, as all too often, contrary to good sense. He cannot produce even an iota or a shred of evidence to support his claim that Jesus was fastened to the cross with ropes and, instead, has to resort to an unwarranted and thoroughly presumptuous attack on the sound historical record that Jesus was nailed to the cross, once again without any evidence whatsoever that this record is a "fabrication".

If there had been any merit at all in Deedat's attack on the Biblical record of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, he would hardly have had to resort to such ridiculous claims as those we have considered. They indicate a fair measure of desperation in the critic as he battles against the odds to prove an untenable thesis.

6. GOSPEL TRUTHS DELIBERATELY SUPPRESSED BY DEEDAT.

After all that has gone before it will not surprise our readers to find Deedat deliberately expunging words from the Bible that do not suit his purpose. On the day after Jesus' crucifixion the chief priests came to Pilate and in Matthew 27.62-64 we find a request made by them that the tomb should be sealed. It appears in Deedat's booklet as follows:

"Sir, we remember that that deceiver said ... Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made secure until the third day, lest ... the LAST error shall be worse than the FIRST (error)".

(Deedat, Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?, p. 42).

Twice in the quotation one finds three innocuous-looking dots as though something has been omitted because it is unimportant or irrelevant to the issues. Deedat's argument is that the Jews had suddenly realised that Jesus might still be alive and that they might have been "cheated" (p.42). They supposedly went to Pilate to get him to seal the sepulchre so that he could not escape and recover. Nevertheless, says Deedat, they were a day too late

and their "last" error was to allow some of Jesus' disciples an opportunity "to render help to the wounded man" (p.43).

All that has happened here is that Deedat has had so forcibly expunge two clauses in the quotation referred to, not because they are considered unimportant, but because they refute his arguments completely and oblige the reader to discover a totally different picture of what was really transpiring. We shall record the whole quotation as it appears in a modern translation and shall place in capital letters the words wrenched out by Deedat and replaced with dots. The passage reads:

"Sir, we remember how that impostor said, WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE, 'AFTER THREE DAYS I WILL RISE AGAIN'. Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest HIS DISCIPLES GO AND STEAL HIM AWAY, AND TELL THE PEOPLE, 'HE HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD', and the last fraud will be worse than the first".

Matthew 27.62-64

We see immediately that the Jews did not for one minute believe that Jesus had come down alive from the cross. They went to Pilate, speaking of something Jesus had said WHILE HE WAS STILL ALIVE. These words can only be interpreted to mean that in their view Jesus WAS NO LONGER ALIVE. And they asked Pilate to seal the tomb, not because they feared a wounded man might recover, but because they feared his disciples would steal his body and proclaim that he HAD RISEN FROM THE DEAD. This is the obvious and plain meaning of the passage.

It is quite clear why Deedat omitted the clauses in italics. They disprove his theory completely. In fact we have found him regularly using this devious tactic in his booklets against Christianity. He distorts the Scriptures by wrenching some texts out of context which he feels can be tortured and perverted into serving his ends, and then casually ignores others completely which thoroughly discount his theories. Only in this case he has done this with just one passage, twisting some of its words to try and prove that the Jews thought Jesus was still alive, and expunging others which immediately show that this was not what was in their minds at all.

Surely any sincere Muslim can see that the whole theme of his booklet on the crucifixion is a contortion of the truth and that he has constantly warped the clear statements in the Gospels which testify unambiguously to the fact of the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We might add that this is not the first time that we have come across publications published by Deedat's Centre where quotations from other writings are so mistreated. We would advise all readers to treat such quotations, where words are deleted and are simply replaced by three dots, with extreme caution. Invariably what is left has been twisted into yielding an interpretation that the whole quotation could not possibly yield.

The Jews had remembered Jesus' oft-repeated prophecy that he would rise from the dead after three days and they wanted to prevent any possible fulfilment of this prophecy - whether actual through his resurrection or contrived through the actions of his disciples. There is no warrant for Deedat's claim that the "Jews doubted his death" and that they "suspected that he had escaped death on the cross" (p. 79). The words omitted by him in the quotation on page 42 of his booklet show quite plainly that they were satisfied that he was indeed dead, but that they did not want his disciples to claim that he had been raised to life again.

Christians do not object to sincere critical analyses of their scriptures and convictions. In fact we welcome them in a way because they challenge us to be sure of what we believe and no true Christian would want to believe things that could not withstand critical analysis. We do sincerely take offence, however, at publications like Deedat's "Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?" which do nothing but pervert and distort the evidences for our faith and which are calculated to injure our feelings. We are persuaded that most Muslims would feel the same way about any Christian publication that distorted Islam the way Deedat degrades Christianity.

We are comforted to find that there are many Muslims in South Africa who have expressed their keen disapproval of such publications. A local Muslim magazine recently had this to say of Deedat's methods:

It is a well known fact throughout South Africa, even among Christian evangelical circles, that in so far

as Mr. Ahmed Deedat in particular is concerned, the Muslim community of South Africa as a whole is not in total agreement with his method of propagating Islam. The Muslim Digest itself provides ample testimony for having been reluctantly compelled over the years to condemn in no uncertain terms the method of Mr. Deedat's propagation of Islam, especially amongst Christians. No less has Mr. Deedat been condemned by responsible Muslim religious bodies and individuals for the manner in which he propagates Islam that results in ill-will being generated against Muslims.

(The Muslim Digest, Jul/Aug/Sept., 1984)

We shall close with a brief consideration of Deedat's argument that, if it can be proved that Jesus did not die on the cross, this proves he was not crucified at all. We have, in earlier publications, shown that such an obtruse argument arises from a predicament Deedat inflicts on himself with his theory that Jesus survived the cross. For the Qur'an plainly states that Jesus was "neither crucified nor killed" (Surah 4.157) and the overwhelming majority of Muslims throughout the world take this (obviously, in our view) to mean that Jesus was never put on the cross at all. I held a symposium with Deedat in Benoni on the subject "Was Christ Crucified?" in 1975 and the local newspaper thereafter summed up his argument perfectly by saying, "He was crucified, but did not die, he argued" As there are a number of discerning Muslims who have seen that his whole theory debases not only what the Bible says but also what the Qur'an says about the crucifixion, he is now trying to extricate himself from this predicament in which he has placed himself.

He therefore argues that "to crucify" means to "kill on a cross" and says that if a man survived the cross, this means he was never crucified. He shows that in English "to electrocute" means to kill by an electric bolt and that "to hang" means to kill by hanging. Therefore he says that in English "to crucify" must also mean to "kill on a cross" and claims that he cannot be held responsible for a deficiency in the English language which does not have alternative words for an attempted crucifixion, electrocution or hanging.

In saying this he misses the point completely. The narratives of the crucifixion in the Bible were originally written in Greek and more than a thousand years were to pass before they would ever be translated into English. The important point is not what "to crucify" might mean in Deedat's understanding of English but what it meant in Greek when the Gospels were first written. One quotation will suffice to show that "to crucify" in Biblical times meant simply "to impale on a cross". The Apostle Peter once declared to a Jewish multitude:

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men"

Acts 2.23

The verse clearly reads you crucified and killed, meaning obviously, "you impaled him on a cross and you killed him there" Therefore it is absurd to suggest that if a man was not actually killed on cross, this means he was never crucified. If "to crucify" only meant to kill on a cross, Peter would just have said "you crucified him", but by adding "and killed", he shows plainly that "to crucify" meant simply to impale on a cross. Deedat remains in the predicament of advocating that Jesus was indeed crucified but did not die - a theory repugnant to true Christians and Muslims alike.

One struggles to follow the reasoning behind Deedat's line of approach. He seems to think that if he can prove that Jesus did not die on the cross, this proves that the Qur'an is true when it says he was not killed by the Jews. But how can the point possibly stand when the whole argument of necessity concedes the other thing the Qur'an denies - the actual crucifixion of Jesus? There just does not seem to be any logic in his argument at all.

AHMED DEEDAT'S CRUCIFIXION THEORY

A Muslim Perspective from MOHAMMED BANA

For many years Ahmed Deedat has been promoting a theory that Jesus Christ was indeed crucified but was taken

down alive from the cross. This theory was first promoted in his booklet "Was Christ Crucified?" and has recently been perpetuated in his new booklet "Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?" We have often remarked that Mr. Deedat has been promoting a Qadiani theory, approved only by the Ahmadiyya Movement which has been declared a non-Muslim minority sect in Pakistan. His theory must be deplored by true Christians and Muslims alike. Readers will be interested to know that the same opinion has been expressed by MOHAMMED BANA of Durban. He says of Deedat's theory:

Mr. Deedat is fond of making lectures about other denominations but very seldom on Islam. He seems to have a fixed notion about Prophet Jesus' Crucifixion Theory. In his lectures he hardly gave the Islamic viewpoint or seldom the Christian viewpoint, thus confusing his audience. I believe he likes to make the Qadianis of this country very happy by mostly giving their viewpoint that Jesus after being put on the cross, swooned. Now why should Mr Deedat tell his audience that Jesus was put on the cross and he swooned because nowhere the Qur'an speaks that Jesus was put on the cross and he swooned. Mr. Deedat is the only person who can tell us whether he is preaching either the Christian doctrine, the Muslim doctrine or the Qadiani doctrine?"

[MOHAMMED BANA, "Allegations Confirmed", p. 3]

Mohammed Bana has rightly endorsed our complaint that the crucifixion booklets published by Mr. Deedat are contrary to the teaching of both the Bible and the Qur'an and should be rejected by Christians and Muslims alike.

Deedat in the Balance

Mr Ahmad Deedat has been acclaimed as a hero and the defender of faith by many Muslims. However, there are some who see him as the opposite.

The following are extracts from a magazine called THE MUSLIM DIGEST, produced in South Africa. In introducing that particular issue of the magazine, the Editor wrote:

This issue of the Muslim Digest representing the months of July, August, September and October, 1986 is almost entirely devoted in the public interest - both Muslim and non-Muslim - through an indictment against Mr. Ahmad Deedat of the Islamic Propagation Centre, for his various and dangerous activities. (The Muslim Digest p. 2)

DEEDAT AND ISLAM

Let us read then the extracts from THE MUSLIM DIGEST, they are what the 'Ulama of Islam has said about Ahmad Deedat. FROM HERE ON ALL THE FOLLOWING ARE EXTRACTS FROM THE MUSLIM DIGEST:

DEEDAT'S GURU NO. 1

"Mr Ahmed Deedat, the head of Islamic Propagation Centre, has openly admitted that he is no man of letters as far as secular knowledge is concerned, and in so far as Islamic knowledge is concerned, from his own admission, he has gleaned it from those who have inspired him, including individuals such as JOSEPH PERDU, the BAHAI, who in the 1950's came to South Africa to undermine the faith of the Muslims, and who was thoroughly exposed by us to leave South Africa during that period. The exposure of Perdu is contained in a number of pamphlets brought out by us, and also in several issues of the Muslim Digest.

We quote Ahmed Deedat on the influence of Joseph Perdu, the Bahae, from his own (Deedat's) explanation published in the columns of the INDIAN VIEWS in its issue of November 6, 1957. said Deedat:

"I have learnt from Mr Joseph Perdu more about ISLAM than I had learnt in the previous 38 years of my life." - INDIAN VIEWS 6/11/57.

It is a psychological fact that if one obtains religious knowledge from a dubious source, the danger always exists that a dubious influence could be left on one's mind that could later be dangerous to one's faith, and that of

others, particularly if one is engaged in Islamic Propagation work. We of the Muslim Digest subscribed to this view then and we reiterate this view now.

Deedat then appeared to be in an unholy alliance with Dr Mall of the Arabic Study Circle who (Dr Mall) continued to organise Joseph Perdu's lectures among Muslim's in Durban even after Joseph Pedru told Advocate Bawa in the presence of Dr Mall and Pr Wahhajur Rasul that "there was nothing in the Qur'an to show that Prophet Mohammad was the LAST PROPHET." Dr Mall remained silent all the time when Perdu said this.

Mr Perdu, in his attempt to sow the seeds of Bahaism among Muslim intellectuals first, further told Advocate Bawa that "ISLAM IS NO MORE" ... ISLAM CAME FOR ONLY A THOUSAND (1000) YEARS". Subsequently Advocate I.M. Bawa issued a Pamphlet against Joseph Perdu and we reproduce the relevant part of Advocate Bawa's pamphlet for the benefit of our readers." (M.D. p.49-50)

DEEDAT'S GURU NO. 2

DEEDAT'S GREAT 'SERVANT OF ISLAM' RASHAD KHALIFA NOW SAYS: TWO FALSE VERSES UNVEILED IN QUR'AN!

RASHAD KHALIFA, inventor of the spurious theory of Number 19, [By the use of numerology it claims that there is an arithmetic pattern based on the number 19 running through the Qur'an] cleverly camouflaged his hypocrisy and sinister designs by wearing the mask of a sincere Muslim. Having beguiled the Muslim community into believing his new-fangled theory of number 19, he is now gradually unmasking himself and revealing his true identity. The first glimpse of Rashad Khalifa's hypocrisy came into light when he declared in his bulletin, MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE, of March, 1985, that:

"THE COMPUTER EXPOSES AN HISTORICAL CRIME; TAMPERING WITH THE WORD OF GOD;
TWO FALSE VERSES UNVEILED IN QUR'AN; AN INVITATION TO ALL MUSLIMS TO EXAMINE
THE EVIDENCE BEFORE REMOVING THE FALSEHOOD."

In the April 1985 issue of Rashad Khalifa's MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE, a bold sub-heading tells the Muslim world: "MORE EVIDENCE CONFIRMS THE FALSEHOOD OF THE LAST TWO VERSES OF SURAH 9."

PARTNER

We accept his invitation to "examine the evidence". Before doing so, however, we wish to remove another mask and expose the face of his partner in this insidious crime against the Holy Qur'an. the man who became instrumental in disseminating the nefarious idea of Rashad Khalifa is none other than the recipient of the King Faisal Award from the Saudi Arabian Government for his "outstanding services" to Islam - MR AHMAD DEEDAT.

Ahmad Deedat's fascination and preoccupation with the theory of No. 19 became an obsession; and despite rational criticisms and rebuttal of the theory by prominent writers throughout the Muslim world, he (Ahmad Deedat) has remained its steadfast champion and an ardent supporter of his mentor, Rashad Khalifa, whom he calls "that great servant of Islam".

"HIS MASTER'S VOICE"

Mr Ahmad Deedat wrote a tract in 1979 entitled AL-QUR'AN: THE ULTIMATE MIRACLE, in which he slavishly echoed Rashad Khalifa's ideas. In fact Ahmad Deedat effectively became "His Master's Voice". He (Ahmad Deedat) says in his tract:

"I have in all humility taken the liberty of bringing the scientific findings of that great servant of Islam - Dr Rashad Khalifa Ph.D., in my own humble way... In it I have freely utilised Dr Rashad Khalifa's data and in places I have used his actual eloquent words verbatim for lack of better expression." (Deedat in his booklet - "Al-Qur'an - the Ultimate Miracle").

This tract of Deedat is freely distributed from Deedat's headquarters in Durban, South Africa. In October 1985 he published its First Reproduction in U.K. (20 000 copies) for free distribution. Ahmad Deedat thus became an accomplice of Rashad Khalifa by aiding and abetting him in his avowed aim to attack the integrity of the Holy Qur'an." (M.D. p.25-26)

"And now Rashad Khalifa, Deedat's GURU number 2, says in his recent bulletin called, " MUSLIM PERSPECTIVE " that the last two verses in the Qur'an in Sura nine are false, and should not form part of the Qur'an! - Muslim perspective - April, 1985. Muslims all over the world are labelling Rashad Khalifa as a Murtad, some say he is a Kafer, others say, he is a Munafiq, still others say he is not a Muslim, and is outside the pale of Islam. Now if Ahmed Deedat has derived his Islamic knowledge from such a dubious authority as Khalifa, then it stands to reason that Deedat has no first hand knowledge of ISLAM at all and that his (Deedat's) knowledge of Islam is not only shallow and second hand, but DANGEROUS.

Rashad Khalifa has openly committed KUFR and it must follow therefore that Deedat is pedaling Rashad Khalifa's KUFR to unsuspecting Muslims through his lectures on Rashad Khalifa's theories and booklets, of which there is no doubt." (M.D. p.53)

"MUHAMMAD SAMIULLAIL head of the Islamic Research Bureau of Karachi had this to say about Rashad Khalifa, who is Deedat's GURU number 2:

"A perusal of Rashad Khalifa's translation will convince the reader that it has been made for the sole purpose of denigrating and dismantling the position of Hadith and Sunnah from the edifice of Shari'ah. Those who believe in Hadith along with the Qur'an as the basis of the Islam, are accused as "false Muslims" and "idol worshippers".

Hadith is dismissed as conjectures and forgery. According to him "Hadith is more than inventions by the enemies of the prophet, aimed at repelling the people from god's way and from the Qur'an" (P.347 Rashad Khalifa's Qur'an translation) - MUSLIM DIGEST, March/APRIL 1982.

Sheikh M.S Dien, Imam of Masjid us Salaam in Athlone, Cape Town, had this to say about Rashad Khalifa, who is Deedat's GURU number 2:

Rashad Khalifa's book, the Qur'an: the final Scripture (Authorised English version), is a disgrace to Qur'anic translation and Exegesis, it should be banned by Muslim Authority, organisations, institutions and individuals throughout the world. (M. D. p. 52-53)

"MAJLIS" ON DEEDAT'S ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE

"THE MAJLIS NEWSPAPER published from Port Elisabeth by Maulavi Sadak Desai condemns Deedat in no uncertain terms regarding Deedat's Islamic knowledge, by saying:

Firstly, it is essential to state and stress that Mr Deedat is not a man of Islamic learning. He is not qualified to speak on matters pertaining to the Shariah. What is Fardh upon Mr Deedat is the acquisition of the basic rules pertaining to Wudhu, Salaat, Saum, etc. So that he may be in position to discharge his daily Islamic duties. But, Islamic law is not his avenue. Mr Deedat is absolutely confused by claiming that "there is no prohibition against women attending mosque" and "this is not traditionally done". His confusion is the product of his stark ignorance of the Shariah.

Mr Deedat is dabbling in matters about which he has no knowledge and possesses no ability and no qualification, and has brought himself under the purview of Rasulullah's (Sallallahu alaihu wasallam) warning.

"He who speaks a lie on me should prepare his abode in the fire"

It is about people of Mr Deedat's calibre that Sayyidina Umar said:

"Verily, the people of opinion are the enemies of the Sunnah."

All Muslims should beware of the un-Islamic and baatil propagation of those who hold no status in Islamic knowledge. The modernists in propagating the Kufr and Baatil and trifling with Imman. Their end shall be disaster. ("Majlis", vol.4, no.6 - Port Elizabeth) (M.D. p.54)

DEEDAT AND THE AFRIKAANS TRANSLATION OF THE QUR'AN

"MR. Deedat's representation on behalf of Islam itself is also in doubt, as his beliefs on Jesus (a.s.) from Islamic point of view, are shrouded in ambiguity. When cornered, Mr. Deedat says that he believes as the Muslims believe, but the latest black and white proof is that despite having revised Mr. Amin Baker's Afrikaans translation of the Qur'an, Mr. Deedat's Propagation Centre left the Qadiani interpretation on Nabi Isa (Jesus) intact, when it printed a new edition of this Qur'an translation recently and sold them throughout the country. Deedat's new edition of this Qur'an states that Nabi Isa (Jesus) is dead. (M. D., p.140-141)

DEEDAT MAKES A SOMERSAULT OVER TV ?

"In what was construed by Muslims as a somersault in his views on Muslim women attending mosques after the "MAJLIS" attack on Deedat, in wanting to correct his views on a subject over TV, Mr. Deedat landed himself into further hot water, as the following letter to the Muslim Digest at the time shows:

DEAR SIR,

"I am sure that thousands of Muslim women must have seen the TV program recently when Mr Ahmed Deedat of Durban spoke about Muslim women not being encouraged to pray in the mosque with men. I think most Muslim women will be disappointed with Mr Deedat's poor showing of Muslim women on the TV programme, and personally I am utterly disgusted at the uncouth manner in which Mr Deedat explained why women are not encouraged to come and pray in the mosque.

Firstly, we Muslim women do not pray WITH the men in the mosques, and Mr Deedat Knows that there are separate halls, galleries, etc attached to the mosques, for Muslim women where prayer facilities are provided.

This is why I think I will be expressing the utter disgust of all Muslim womanhood when Mr Deedat gave as reason for Muslim women not being encouraged to come and pray in the mosque, is that at the time of ablution (WUZU) women have to lift their legs (and Mr Deedat even lifted his leg to demonstrate!) in the presence of men when they are making WUZU. Mr Editor, Mr Deedat knows that women don't make ablution (wuzu) WITH the men in any mosque. In fact, in nearly all cases, when Muslim women go to pray in mosques where separate faculties exist for prayer, they make WUZU at home and come.

Mr Deedat should be ashamed of himself for insulting and disgracing Muslim womanhood in front of the public on TV, especially as he claims to be a preacher of Islam. Please print this Mr Editor without fail.

From all the foregoing it will be seen that Deedat has no real knowledge about ISLAM at all. His religious knowledge is found wanting. What he preaches and writes about Islam is most dangerous and Muslims are asked to take note of this and reject his so called no. 19 Computer theory of the Qur'an reject his controversial lectures, reject his first GURU Joseph Perdu and reject his second GURU Rashad Khalifa too, who now says the last two verses of the Qur'an are false and should not have been included in the Holy Qur'an by those who compiled it, implying in other words, that Caliph Omar and Caliph Uthman should not have included the last 2 verses of Sura 9 in the Qur'an. In other words it means that the various Qur'an translations that Deedat advertisers and sells left, right and centre, are no more the LAST Testament, and the Qur'an is no more the ULTIMATE MIRACLE!" (M.D., p.54-55)

[After all that, no wonder the Muslim digest else where went on to say]

...Deedat is only a "pretender" to the "ISLAMIC THRONE". Deedat really represents nobody, but himself. He does not represent the Muslims of the world; he does not represent the Muslim of South Africa; he does not represent the Muslims of Natal; he does not represent the Muslims of Durban; he does not represent the Muslims of his own little town of Verulam either where he resides, and in fact that the Trustees of the Verulam Muslim MOSQUE have even banned Deedat from making a speech or lecture in the only Muslim Mosque in his own home town of VERULAM. (M. D., p.140)

DEEDAT AND THE HINDU RELIGION

(PLEASE NOTE THIS ARTICLE WAS REPRODUCED BY THE MUSLIM DIGEST JULY TO OCT. 1986)

"Deedat has embarrassed the faithful followers of Islam, hurt, distressed and pained relatives and friends, violated basic principles, infuriated Christians and Hindus and insists on continuing his religious crusade that does more harm than good to the cause of Islam that he claims he espouses.

The Church's attitude was correct and so was the attitude of its leaders for, in the process of denigrating Christianity, Deedat insulted Islam and Prophet Muhammed (s.a.w.) himself, for while quoting the Qur'anic verse of how one should go about propagating Islam - that is, "with wisdom and beautiful preaching," Deedat has, time and again, flouted these lofty principles, with there being neither "wisdom" nor "beauty" in his preaching methods. In fact, of late, his method of propagating Islam has even begun to stink to high heaven itself!

IN RESPONSE TO DEEDAT'S OBJECTIONABLE VIDEO TAPE ON HINDUISM

Pamphlet headed: 'WAS KAABA A HINDU TEMPLE? IS ALLAH A HINDU GOD?' Distributed

Mr Deedat's arrogance and the method of his preaching in attacking other religions knows no bounds. His recent attack on the Hindu religion prompted Hindus to react and make counter allegations against ISLAM, the KAABA and against ALLAH HIMSELF, for which Mr Deedat should be held responsible.

A 13-page pamphlet headed:

"WAS KAABA A HINDU TEMPLE?" -- "IS ALLAH A HINDU GOD?"

was very widely distributed in the Gujarati, Tamil, Telegu and the Hindustani sections of the Hindu Community recently. The author of this 13-page pamphlet is Mr P.N. Oak, M.A. LL.B., of Delhi, India. Among other things, the author had this to say:

"Glancing through some research material recently, I was pleasantly surprised to come across a reference to a King Vikramaditya inscription found in the Kaaba temple in Mecca, proving beyond doubt that the Arabian peninsula formed a part of his Indian Empire."

"This discovery changes the entire complexion of ancient history and to a great extent, the history of ancient India. For one thing we may have to revise our concepts about the king who had the largest empire in history. It could be that the expanse of King Vikramaditya's empire was larger than that of all others."

"...The region of King Vikramaditya's empire extended from Bali Island in the South East Pacific to the Baltic Northern Europe, and from Korea to Kaaba. The only difference was that while Indian rulers identified themselves with the local population and established welfare states, Moghuls and others, who ruled conquered lands, perpetrated untold atrocities over the vanquished..."

"The text of the crucial Vikramaditya inscription, found inscribed on a gold dish hung inside the Kaaba shrine in Mecca, is found recorded on page 315 of a volume known as "Sayar-ul-Okul" treasured in the Makhtab-e-sultania (library) in Istanbul, Turkey."

"Rendered in free English the inscription says "Fortunate are those who were born (and lived) during King Vikrama's reign. He was a noble, generous, dutiful ruler, devoted to the welfare of his subjects."

Mr P.N. Oak, the author of the pamphlet, then goes on to quote the Arabic and reproduces the same in Roman script and quotes (page 315 "Sayar-ul-Okul"). [something seems to be missing here but that is how it is in the original in the Muslim Digest] The title "Sayar-ul-Okul" signifies MEMORABLE WORDS, says Mr Oak.

Mr Oak further says:

"...that the so-called Kutab Minar in Delhi could well be King Vikramaditya's tower commemorating his conquest of Arabia."

"...The first modern edition of "Sayar-ul-Okul" was printed and published in Berlin in A.D. 1864. A subsequent is the one published in Beirut in A.D. 1932."

"...The book also contains an elaborate description of the ancient shrine of Mecca, the town and the annual fair known as OKAJ which used to be held every year around the Kaaba temple in Mecca. This should convince readers that the annual Hajj of the Muslims to the Kaaba is not an Islamic speciality, but a mere continuation of an earlier pre-Islamic congregation."

"...Mecca, therefore followed the Varanasi (Benares) tradition of providing a venue for important discussions among the learned while the masses congregated there for spiritual bliss. The principal shrines at both Varanasi in India and at Mecca in Arabasthan (Arabia) were Shiva temples, even to this day the ancient Mahadova emblems. It is the Shankara stone which Muslim pilgrims reverently touch and kiss in the Kaaba."

"...The main shrine in Mecca, which houses the Shiva emblem, is known as the Kaaba. It is clothed in a black shroud. That custom also originates from the days when it was thought necessary to discourage its recapture (by enemies) by camouflaging it."

"...Muslim pilgrims visiting the Kaaba temple go around it seven times. In no other Mosque does this circumambulation prevail. Hindus invariably circumambulate around their deities. This is yet another proof that the Kaaba shrine is a pre-Islamic Indian Shiva temple where the Hindu practise of circumambulation is still meticulously observed."

"...Another Hindu tradition still associated with the Kaaba is that of the sacred stream Ganga. According to Hindu tradition Ganga is also as inseparable from the Shiva emblem as the crescent moon. Wherever there is a Shiva emblem, Ganga must co-exist. True to that association a sacred foundation exists near the Kaaba. Its water is held sacred because it had been traditionally regarded as Ganga since pre-Islamic times."

"...It might come as a stunning revelation to many that the word "ALLAH" itself is Sanskrit. In Sanskrit Allah, Akka and Amba are synonyms. They signify a goddess or mother. The term Allah forms part of Sanskrit chants invoking goddess Durga, also known as Bhavani, Chandi and Mahishasuramardini. The Islamic word Allah for God is therefore, not an innovation but the ancient Sanskrit appellation retained and continued by Islam. Allah means mother or goddess and mother goddess."

"...Vaidik descriptions about the moon, the different solar constellations and the creation of the universe have been incorporated from the Vedas in Koran, part 1, chapter 2, stanzas 113, 114, 115 and 158, 189; Chapter 10, stanzas 4 to 7."

"...Recital of the Namaz five times a day owes its origin to the Vaidik injunction of Panchamayajnya which was part of the daily Vaidik ritual prescribed for all individuals."

"...The Islamic term "Eed-ul-Fitr" derives from the "Eed of Piters", that is, worship of forefathers, in Sanskrit tradition. In India Hindus commemorate their ancestors during the Pitri-Paksha, that is, the fortnight reserved for their remembrance. The very same is the significance of Eed-ul-Fitr (worship of forefathers)."

(Reproduced by Muslim Digest, July to Oct. 1986 pages. 23-24) (Article written by Mr P.N. Oak at N-128,

Greater Kailas 1, New Delhi 14, India and distributed from Durban, South Africa).

All the foregoing, from a historical and Islamic point of view, is questionable and highly objectionable, and is only a part of the contents of the 13-page pamphlet distributed in the Hindu community recently, directly as a result of Mr Deedat's objectionable lecture on video tape on Hinduism. The aim of the writer and distributors of the pamphlet is clear to all Muslims, and the blame for it all must rest squarely on the shoulders of Mr Ahmed Deedat. - (Editor, MUSLIM DIGEST).

DEEDAT AND CHRISTIANITY

This is a letter written to Mr. Deedat published in the Muslim Digest:

"Your thesis, forceful as it may be, is an anti-thesis of the view held by the majority of the Muslims, in particular the Ahl-Hadith followers. Their view is opposed to your thesis. They believe that Jesus was never put on the cross and was "taken up". Your arguments very ably axed by the Ahl-Hadith's fundamental belief about Jesus. They were present in the hall. Amazing as it may be, your every blow to their fundamental belief made them clap with joy! So much so that they even shouted "Allah-o-Akbar, not knowing that their own fundamental belief was systematically and logically being eliminated! As they clapped and cheered I remembered the Qur'anic verse: Deaf, Dumb, Blind Q.2:18" (The MUSLIM DIGEST, Durban, South Africa, 1986, p.35.)

TRANSCAAL IN THE 1970'S - THE SYMPOSIUM THAT LEAD TO GREAT HUMILIATION FOR MUSLIMS AND DEEDAT

In the Transvaal a symposium was organised at Benoni by Deedat's friends in which Mr John Gilchrist of the Christian faith opposed Deedat. Mr Adam Peerbhay who was present at the symposium had this to say, which we reproduce from the MUSLIM DIGEST:-

AT THE SENSATIONAL UPSET in Benoni, Transvaal, the huge audience was asked by Mr John Gilchrist, at the conclusion of Mr Ahmad Deedat's lecture on "WAS CHRIST CRUCIFIED" (which in reality was a half-Qadiani theory and Un-Islamic) [Mr Deedat believes that Jesus was crucified but did not die on the cross, he only fainted], a simple question:

IS MR DEEDAT RIGHT IN HIS EXPLANATION OF CRUCIFIXION?

The audience, without reflection, in a loud roar, said:

YES ! MR DEEDAT IS RIGHT.

So, the Benoni lawyer, Mr John Gilchrist pointed to the verse of the Holy Koran which states:

"BUT THEY KILLED HIM NOT, NOR CRUCIFIED HIM".

This is how Mr. John Gilchrist trapped the Muslim audience:

"You have heard already that we have heard the Islamic viewpoint put forth by Mr Ahmed Deedat. Now I want to ask first something, this: Do you believe what Mr Ahmed Deedat said? (Loud roar: YES). I am going to go so far as to ask every Muslim here tonight that if you believe what Mr Deedat said (Another loud roar : YES), you don't believe what the Qur'an says (YES!?)"

"I ask any Muslim to stand up here tonight and to tell me that the Qur'an does not say that Christ was never put on a cross, that in fact it was someone else, am I not right? Does the Qur'an not say that God took Jesus up to Himself? Does the Qur'an not say that God protected him? Does the Qur'an not say that God made someone else look like him? Does the Qur'an not say that God put that man on the cross? What do you believe? Mr Deedat or the Qur'an ? (Loud answer: "the Qur'an")."

And thus the huge Muslim audience was struck to silence and to defeat, which the Muslim's did not readily accept. So the Muslim audience at one moment in their frenzy roared that Mr Deedat was right, and the next when the truth was pointed out to them from the Qur'an, then they answered that the Qur'an was right, which in

fact shows in what a humiliating position they were put through the crucifixion arguments put forward by Mr Deedat." - Muslim Digest", March 1977.

IF ONLY ADVICE WAS HEEDED

If only Mr Deedat had heeded the warnings given to him on his un-Islamic method of propagating Islam, neither he nor the Muslim community would have suffered such a humiliating defeat. Incidentally, perhaps with wounded pride at the end of this humiliating defeat, Mr Deedat perhaps in frustration, made certain defamatory statements against Mr John Gilchrist that led to a court action by Mr Gilchrist, after Deedat refused to make an apology. Deedat lost the subsequent court action and paid damages and costs totalling to R2,138-00.

(HERE ENDS THE EXTRACTS FROM MUSLIM DIGEST)

OUR COMMENT:

Ahmad Deedat stated in his lectures and books that Jesus was placed on the cross but did not die on it: He only fainted. Every one knows how difficult it is to change the religious beliefs of one person, especially if these beliefs are deeply rooted and have been handed down, generation after generation. For 16 centuries Muslims have denied that Jesus was placed on the cross. It is a known fact that because of the untiring efforts of Ahmad Deedat, millions of Muslims now believe that Jesus was placed on the cross. Thus because of the efforts of the one man, Ahmad Deedat, millions of Muslims have changed their traditional views as to what happened to Jesus.

This instantaneous change in the view of millions of Muslims is a phenomenon that deserves closer investigation. It is either that Ahmad Deedat possesses a stronger logic and appeal than the Islamic tradition that says that someone else was crucified instead of Jesus and that Jesus was lifted up alive to heaven, or that this Islamic tradition is so flimsy, in spite of its antiquity, that it was neither well established nor deeply rooted in the minds of Muslims. This tradition was simply an unsatisfactory explanation on to which they clung. The minute these millions were offered another explanation, they quickly accepted it without much reflection.

There is no doubt that between those who believe that someone else died instead of Jesus on the cross and those who believe Ahmad Deedat's version of what happened to Jesus, other millions are standing on neutral ground, confused as to what to believe. These are more ready to accept the truth of the crucifixion than they were before Ahmad Deedat's thinking became widely known.

Ahmad Deedat deserves to be congratulated, because he, single handed, has shifted the traditional Muslim position a very, very long way towards the Christian position. For now millions of Muslims at least believe that Jesus was placed on the cross. And what a beautiful picture Mr Deedat has painted of Christ to the millions of Muslims, for according to Deedat, Jesus was at least lifted up on the cross, after being insulted by the Jews, suffered and bled because of his faithfulness to God. May God bless you Mr Deedat!

Mr. Deedat has achieved what thousands of missionaries have failed to achieve. What remains now for the gap between the Muslim and the Christian to be closed is for the Christian to convince his Muslim friend that Jesus was not only placed on the cross but did die there also.

History will prove that Ahmad Deedat deserves a higher recognition from Christian leaders for his services to Christianity than the one he received from king Faisal for his services to Islam.

It is written in the Psalms that God the most high "is more able" than any one. He is able to turn defeat into victory, disasters into wonders, and the falsifications of people like those of Ahmad Deedat into evidence for His truth.

God indeed works in mysterious ways. According to the Bible, He can "Out of the eater bring something to eat, And out of the strong bring something sweet."

Or in the language of the Qur'an: "They schemed and God schemed, and God is the best of schemers." (The Qur'an 3:54)

What Indeed Was the Sign of Jonah?

by John Gilchrist

THE SIGN OF JONAH

- [1 Was Jesus Dead or Alive in the Tomb?](#)
- [2 Three Days and Three Nights](#)
- [3 Jonah a Sign to the Men of Nineveh](#)
- [4 No Sign but the Sign of Jonah](#)
- [5 "Destroy this Temple and in Three Days"](#)
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- [THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS](#)
- [WHO MOVED THE STONE?](#)

THE SIGN OF JONAH

According to both the Bible and the Qur'an, Jesus Christ performed many mighty miracles during his brief three-year ministry in the land of Israel. Many of the Jews were led to believe in him when they saw such signs and wonders being performed. The Jewish leaders, however, refused to believe in him and although his miracles were widely known they often pressed him hard to perform signs or, indeed, even give them a sign from heaven (Matthew 16.1). On one occasion Jesus answered them by saying that he would give them only one sign:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

Matthew 12.39-40.

Jonah was one of the great prophets of Israel and he had been called out by God to preach to an Assyrian city named Nineveh and to proclaim its pending doom. Jonah fled on a ship to Tarshish, however, and when a great storm began to rock the boat he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a large fish. After three days in the fish, however, he was brought up alive and duly went into the city.

Jesus spoke of this three-day internment in the stomach of the fish as "the sign of Jonah" and said that it was the only sign he was prepared to give to the unbelieving Jews. During 1976 Ahmed Deedat of the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban published a booklet entitled *What was the Sign of Jonah?*, a title which leads the reader to expect a studied exposition of the subject. Instead one finds that Deedat does not answer his own question at all but ventures into an attack on the statement made by Jesus and endeavours to refute it. His arguments are based entirely on two suppositions, namely that if Jonah had been alive throughout his sojourn in the fish, then Jesus must have been alive in the tomb after being taken down from the cross; and if Jesus was crucified on a Friday and rose on the following Sunday morning, then he could not have been three days and

three nights in the tomb. We shall consider these two objections in order and will thereafter proceed to analyse the whole subject to see what the Sign of Jonah really was.

1. WAS JESUS ALIVE OR DEAD IN THE TOMB?

It is an accepted fact in Christian commentaries on the book of Jonah in the Bible that Jonah was kept miraculously alive during the time that he was in the stomach of the fish in the sea. At no time throughout his ordeal did he die in the fish and so came ashore as much alive as he was when he was first thrown into the sea.

In his booklet Deedat takes some of the words in the text quoted above out of their context and makes the statement read "As Jonah was ... so shall the Son of man be" and concludes:

If Jonah was alive for three days and three nights, then Jesus also ought to have been alive in the tomb as he himself had foretold!

(Deedat, *What was the Sign of Jonah?*, p.6).

Although Jesus had only said that the likeness between him and Jonah would be in the period of time they were each to undergo an internment - Jonah in a fish, Jesus in the heart of the earth - Deedat omits this qualifying reference and claims that Jesus must have been like Jonah in other ways as well, extending the likeness to include the living state of Jonah inside the fish. When Jesus' statement is read as a whole, however, it is quite clear that the likeness is confined to the time factor. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the stomach of the fish, so Jesus would be a similar period in the heart of the earth. One cannot stretch this further, as Deedat does, to say that as Jonah was ALIVE in the fish, so Jesus would be alive in the tomb. Jesus did not say this and such an interpretation does not arise from his saying but is read into it. Furthermore, in speaking of his coming crucifixion, Jesus on another occasion used a similar saying which proves the point quite adequately:

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up".

John 3.14

Here the likeness is clearly in being "lifted up". As Moses LIFTED UP the serpent, so would the Son of man be LIFTED UP, the one for the healing of the Jews, the other for the healing of the nations. In this case the brass serpent Moses made never was alive and if Deedat's logic is applied to this verse we must presume that it means that Jesus must have been dead before he was lifted up, dead on the cross, and dead when taken down from it. Not only is this illogical, the contradiction between the states of Jonah and the brass serpent (the one was always alive through his ordeal, the other was always dead when used as a symbol on a pole) shows that Jesus was only drawing a likeness between himself and Jonah and the brass serpent respectively in the matters he expressly mentions - the THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS and the LIFTING UP on a pole. It does not matter whether Jonah was alive or not - this has nothing to do with the comparison Jesus was making.

By omitting the qualifying reference to the time period in Jonah's case, Deedat makes the saying of Jesus read "As Jonah was ... so shall the Son of man be" and it is from this unrestricted likeness that he seeks to extend the comparison to the state of the prophet in the fish. But if we follow the same method with the other verse quoted, we come to the exact opposite conclusion. In this case the statement would read: "As the serpent ... so shall the Son of man be" and the state of the serpent was always a dead one. This shows quite plainly that in each case Jesus was not intending to extend the likeness between himself and the prophet or object he mentions to the question of life or death but solely to the very comparisons he expressly sets forth. So we see that Deedat's first objection falls entirely to the ground. A contradictory conclusion automatically results from his line of reasoning and no objection or argument which negates itself can ever be considered with any degree of seriousness.

2. THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS.

It is universally agreed among Christians, with a few exceptions, that Jesus was crucified on a Friday and that he rose from the dead on the Sunday immediately following. Deedat accordingly argues that there was only one day on which Jesus was in the tomb, namely Saturday, and that this period covered only two nights, namely Friday night and Saturday night. He thus endeavours to disprove the Sign of Jonah in respect of the time factor that Jesus mentions as well and so concludes:

Secondly, we also discover that he failed to fulfil the time factor as well. The greatest mathematician in

Christendom will fail to obtain the desired result - three days and three nights.

(Deedat, *What was the Sign of Jonah?*, p.10).

Unfortunately Deedat here overlooks the fact that there was a big difference between Hebrew speech in the first century and English speech in the twentieth century. We have found him inclined to this error again and again when he sets out to analyse Biblical subjects. He fails to make allowance for the fact that in those times, nearly two thousand years ago, the Jews counted any part of a day as a whole day when computing any consecutive periods of time. As Jesus was laid in the tomb on the Friday afternoon, was there throughout the Saturday, and only rose sometime before dawn on the Sunday (the Sunday having officially started at sunset on the Saturday according to the Jewish calendar), there can be no doubt that he was in the tomb for a period of three days.

Deedat's ignorance of the Jewish method of computing periods of days and nights and their contemporary colloquialisms leads him to make a serious mistake about Jesus' statement and he proceeds to make much the same mistake about his prophecy that he would be three nights in the tomb as well. The expression three days and three nights is the sort of expression that we never, speaking English in the twentieth century, use today. We must obviously therefore seek its meaning according to its use as a Hebrew colloquialism in the first century and are very likely to err if we judge or interpret it according to the language structure or figures of speech in a very different language in a much later age.

We never, speaking English in the twentieth century, speak in terms of days and nights. If any one decides to go away for, let us say, about two weeks, he will say he is going for a fortnight, or for two weeks, or for fourteen days. I have never yet met anyone speaking the English language say he will be away fourteen days and fourteen nights. This was a figure of speech in the Hebrew of old. Therefore right from the start one must exercise caution for, if we do not use such figures of speech, we cannot presume that they had, in those times, the meanings that we would naturally assign to them today. We must seek out the meaning of the prophecy Jesus made in the context of the times in which it was given.

Furthermore we must also note that the figure of speech, as used in Hebrew, always had the same number of days and nights. Moses fasted forty days and forty nights (Exodus 24.18). Jonah was in the whale three days and three nights (Jonah 1.17). Job's friends sat with him seven days and seven nights (Job 2.13). We can see that no Jew would have spoken of "seven days and six nights" or "three days and two nights", even if this was the period he was describing. The colloquialism always spoke of an equal number of days and nights and, if a Jew wished to speak of a period of three days which covered only two nights, he would have to speak of three days and three nights. A fine example of this is found in the Book of Esther where the queen said that no one was to eat or drink for three days, night or day (Esther 4.16), but on the third day, when only two nights had passed, she went into the king's chamber and the fast was ended.

So we see quite plainly that "three days and three nights", in Jewish terminology, did not necessarily imply a full period of three actual days and three actual nights but was simply a colloquialism used to cover any part of the first and third days.

The important thing to note is that an equal number of days and nights were always spoken of, even if the actual nights were one less than the days referred to. As we do not use such figures of speech today we cannot pass hasty judgments on their meaning, nor can we force them to yield the natural interpretations that we would place on them.

There is conclusive proof in the Bible that when Jesus told the Jews he would be three days and three nights in the earth, they took this to mean that the fulfilment of the prophecy could be expected after only two nights. On the day after his crucifixion, that is, after only one night, they went to Pilate and said:

Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again'.

Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day.

Matthew 27.63-64.

We would understand the expression "after three days" to mean anytime on the fourth day but, according to the colloquialism, the Jews knew this referred to the third day and were not concerned to keep the tomb secured through three full nights but only until the third day after just two nights. Clearly, therefore, the expressions

"three days and three nights" and "after three days" did not mean a full period of seventy-two hours as we would understand them, but any period of time covering a period of up to three days.

If someone told anyone of us on a Friday afternoon in these days that he would return to us after three days we would probably not expect him back before the following Tuesday at the earliest. The Jews, however, anxious to prevent any fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy (whether actual or contrived), were only concerned to have the tomb secured until the third day, that is, the Sunday, because they knew that the expressions "after three days" and "three days and three nights" were not to be taken literally but according to the figures of speech that they used in their times.

The important question is, not how we read such colloquialisms which have no place in our figures of speech today, but how the Jews read them according to the terminology of their times. It is very significant to note that when the disciples boldly claimed that Jesus had risen from the dead on the third day, that is, on the Sunday after only two nights had passed (e.g. Acts 10.40), no one ever attempted to counter this testimony as Deedat does by claiming that three nights would have to pass before the prophecy could be deemed to be fulfilled. The Jews of those times knew their language well and it is only because Deedat is ignorant of their manners of speech that he presumptuously attacks the prophecy Jesus made, simply because he was not in the tomb for an actual three-day and three-night period of seventy-two hours. (This means that Jonah's sojourn in the fish also only covered a partial period of three days and was not necessarily three actual days and nights either).

Having therefore adequately disposed of Deedat's weak arguments against the sign Jesus offered to the Jews we can now proceed to find out exactly what the Sign of Jonah really was.

3. JONAH A SIGN TO THE MEN OF NINEVEH.

Two momentous events occurred when God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn the people of that city that God was about to destroy it for its wickedness. The first we have already briefly considered, namely the casting of the prophet into the sea and his sojourn in the stomach of the fish over a period of three days. It will be useful at this stage, however, to record the story as it is found in the Qur'an and to compare it with the story as it appears in the Bible to see to what extent the stories coincide. The narrative in the Qur'an reads:

And lo! Jonah verily was of those sent (to warn). When he fled unto the laden ship, and then drew lots and was of those rejected; and the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy; And had he not been one of those who glorify (Allah), He would have tarried in its belly till the day when they are raised. Then We cast him on a desert shore while he was sick; and We caused a tree of gourd to grow above him; and We sent him to a hundred thousand (folk) or more. And they believed, therefore We gave them comfort for a while.

Surah 37.239-148.

The story is rather disjointed in this passage as there is no sequence of events showing how each incident leads on to the next one. It is in the Book of Jonah in the Bible, however, that one finds the whole narrative properly knit together. Jonah agreed to join in the throwing of lots with the other soldiers on the boat to discover who was the cause of the storm which threatened to drown them all. The lot fell on him and so he was thrown into the sea where he was duly swallowed up by a large fish. After three days the fish coughed him up on dry land and he duly went to Nineveh, proclaiming that the city would be overthrown in forty days.

The other great event was the total repentance of the whole city, from its king to all its slaves, when they heard the ominous warning. Jonah, surprisingly, was angry when he saw the people turn from their sins for he knew that God was merciful and would probably spare the city. As a patriotic Hebrew he had hoped for its overthrow for it was the main city of Assyria and a constant threat to the people of Israel. In the heat of the day he went up a mound hoping to see its demise, and God caused a gourd (a large plant) to grow up and give him shelter. The next day, however, God appointed a worm to consume its stem and thus cause it to wither. Jonah was very upset about this but God said to him:

"You pity the plant, for which you did not labor, nor did you make it grow, which came into being in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also

much cattle?"

Jonah 4.10-11.

The second great event in this story, that is, the repentance of the whole city of Nineveh, was all the more remarkable when one considers that the Assyrians neither knew nor feared God and had no obvious reason why they should heed the word and warning which Jonah brought. There was no sign that the city would be destroyed in forty days as Jonah warned as life was just going on normally from day to day without any suggestion from the weather or the elements that any danger was near.

No thunderclouds formed over the city as had happened at the time of Noah when the great flood burst on the earth. Nineveh was a mighty city and was in no way under any military threat. All that the city heard was the solitary voice of a Jewish prophet who came proclaiming: "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (Jonah 3.4).

We often see cartoons of bearded old men carrying placards "the world ends tonight" and such men are always a source of amusement when they appear on the streets with such messages. Indeed the Ninevites might have considered that Jonah was just one of these religious freaks and while being amused at his apparent earnestness, they might have become somewhat indignant at the content of his warning.

When the Apostle Paul went to the city of Athens he was met with such a reception. In response to his preaching some said "What would this babbler say"? (Acts 17.18). The people of Nineveh listening to the Hebrew prophet Jonah might well have mused as the Athenians did about the Apostle Paul, "He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities" (Acts 17.18). We discover, however, that:

The people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Jonah 3.5

From the throne of the king down to the least of the common folk the hundreds of thousands of Ninevites took Jonah in all seriousness, repented in great earnest, and desperately sought to remove the imminent judgment from their city. Jonah in no way endeavoured to persuade them of the truth of his short, simple warning - he just proclaimed it as a matter of fact. He also gave them no assurance that God would spare the city if they repented. It was, on the contrary, his wish and expectation that the city would be destroyed in terms of God's warning whether the Ninevites took him seriously or not.

Why then did the whole city repent and do so in the hope that God would not cause them to perish? (Jonah 3.9). Jewish historians were fascinated by this story and concluded that the only possible explanation was that the Ninevites knew that Jonah had been swallowed up by a fish as God's judgment on his disobedience, and also knew that while he would normally die in such circumstances, God in mercy kept him alive and delivered him from the stomach of the fish on the third day. This alone could explain the seriousness with which they listened to Jonah and their hope of mercy if they repented.

The Jewish historians concluded that the Ninevites reasoned that if God treats his beloved prophets so severely when they disobey him, what could they expect when the city was in the gall of bitterness against him and in the bond of iniquity and sin?

The reasoning of the Jews was correct. Jesus confirmed that Nineveh's repentance came about as a result of their full knowledge of Jonah's ordeal of the preceding days. He made this quite plain when he said:

"Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh".

Luke 11.30

In saying this Jesus put the seal of authenticity on the story of Jonah's ordeal and Nineveh's repentance and confirmed that it was historically true. At the same time he also gave credence to the theory that the people of Nineveh had heard of Jonah's ordeal and remarkable deliverance and as a result of this took his message in all seriousness, hoping for a similar deliverance in turning from their wickedness in repentance before God. By saying that Jonah had become a sign to the men of Nineveh he made it plain that the city knew of the recent history of God's dealing with the rebellious Jewish prophet. This explained the earnestness with which the Ninevites repented before God.

It was not Jesus' intention merely to confirm Jewish speculations, however. He wished to show that what had happened at the time of Jonah and its sequel was applicable to the people of Israel in his own generation and that a similar sign was about to be given which would likewise lead to the redemption of those who received it and the destruction of all those who did not.

4. NO SIGN BUT THE SIGN OF JONAH.

According to both the Qur'an and the Bible, Jesus performed many signs and wonders among the people of Israel (Surah 5.110, Acts 2.22). Even though they could not deny these works (John 11.47), they nevertheless refused to believe in him and that right to the very end of his course. As he was completing his ministry we read of their response to all that he had done among them:

Though he had done so many signs before them, yet they did not believe in him.

John 12.37

Time and again we read that the Jews came to him seeking signs (Matthew 12.38) and on one occasion they expressly asked him to actually show them a sign from heaven itself (Matthew 16.1). On other occasions they taxed him with questions like these:

"What sign have you to show us for doing this?"

John 2.18

"What sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you?"

John 6.30

While the Greeks of that age were primarily philosophers, the Jews wanted every claim proved by the ability to do and perform signs. As the Apostle Paul rightly said in one of his letters:

For the Jews demand signs and the Greeks seek wisdom.

1 Corinthians 1.22

The Jews knew full well that Jesus was, in his own way, claiming to be the Messiah. If so, they reasoned, he must do signs to prove his claim. Although he had already done many great signs, they still were not satisfied. They had seen him feed up to five thousand men with only five barley loaves and two fishes (Luke 9.10-17) but they reasoned that Moses had done similar miracles (John 6.31). In what way could he prove that he really was the chosen Messiah, they reasoned? What sign could he do to show them that he was greater than Moses?

In those days people were not readily persuaded by great signs. When Moses turned his rod into a serpent, Pharaoh's magicians did likewise. They also emulated his feat of turning water into blood and bringing swarms of frogs from the Nile. It was only when Moses brought out thousands of gnats from the dust that the magicians conceded: "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8.19), for they were finally unable to do likewise. So also the Jews were only prepared to consider Jesus' claims when he could outdo the signs of the prophets of old. They saw him feed five thousand men and heal lepers and men born blind; raise up paralytics, cast out demons; and ultimately raise a man from the dead even though the man had already been dead for four days. They conceded these miracles.

All this did not satisfy them, however, for other prophets had performed similar miracles. What sign did Jesus have for them which outweighed them all? Surely if he was the Messiah he could do greater things than these? Why, Moses gave their forefathers bread from heaven to eat. As it was predicted of the Messiah that he would do similar signs (Deuteronomy 18.18,34.10-11), they therefore came to Jesus eventually and "asked him to show them a sign from heaven" (Matthew 16.1). Jesus absorbed their earnest quests for signs and said to them:

"This generation is an evil generation: it seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be to this generation".

Luke 11.29-30.

They wanted a sign that would prove beyond all shadow of doubt that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. Here Jesus gave them a clear answer and set before them just one sign by which they could be assured of his claims, namely, the Sign of Jonah. Although we have mentioned it already, it will be useful at this point to refer to it once again:

"For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

Matthew 12.40

Here Jesus quite plainly outlined the proof of his claims. Jonah had been three days and three nights in the stomach of the fish. Not only was this a sign to Nineveh, it also prefigured the sign Jesus was to be for his people and not for them alone but for all people in all ages. He would be in the "heart of the earth" for a similar period. What did this mean? Would he be dead? Why would he be there three days? Assuredly the Jews must have been very perplexed about this claim but every time they asked Jesus for a sign, he promised them no other sign but the Sign of Jonah. During one incident with them he plainly told them its meaning.

5. "DESTROY THIS TEMPLE AND IN THREE DAYS ..."

When Jesus saw that the Jews were transforming the Temple (the great place of worship where God's glory was in the centre of Jerusalem, known in Islam as the Baitul-Muqaddas) from a house of prayer into a place of trade, he drove out the moneychangers and those who sold sheep, oxen and pigeons. The Jews then said to him:

"What sign have you to show us for doing this?"

John 2.18

In other words, by what authority do you, a man, enter the Temple of the living God and act as if you are the Lord of it? Once again they requested a sign and again the same sign was promised by Jesus:

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up".

John 2.19

Once again Jesus gave them the Sign of Jonah. Again there came the period of three days but now something more is added. He challenges the Jews to destroy the temple and whereas he earlier spoke of being himself in the heart of the earth for three days, now he speaks of the temple of God being destroyed for three days and thereafter being restored. So the Jews said to him:

"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple and will you raise it up in three days?"

John 2.20

Now that was a silly question. They asked for a sign of supernatural source to validate the action Jesus had taken. If he had said "Destroy this temple and in forty-six years I will build another", what sort of sign would that be? But he said he would do it in only three days. That would assuredly be a sign for them to see and behold, proving that he was indeed all that he claimed to be.

This was one of the most momentous statements Jesus ever made and if ever there was a remark of his that made an indelible impression on the minds of the Jews, it was this one.

When Jesus was brought to trial years later, the two witnesses brought to testify against him both mentioned this remarkable claim. One said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days'" (Matthew 26. 61). Another said, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another not made with hands'" (Mark 14.58). Both of these men twisted his statement primarily through a total misunderstanding and inability to perceive the meaning of it. But that it was a claim of great import they realised!

Indeed even when Jesus was nailed to the cross some of the Jewish priests mocked him, saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!" (Matthew 27.40). Even some time after Jesus had ascended to heaven the Jews were still talking about his challenge and imagined that it was Christian belief that Jesus would yet come to destroy their holy place (Acts 6.14).

The tremendous attention paid by the Jews to this statement, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" shows how important it was. Even as these Jews mocked him, however, they were unaware that they themselves were doing just that they were destroying it by putting Jesus on the cross; and on the third day thereafter they would know that he had risen again. When Jesus said "Destroy this temple" he was not referring to the great building in the city but to his own body. In his Gospel John comments on the reply of the Jews about the number of years it took to build the Temple, "But he spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2.21).

Jesus said that it was he, the Son of man, who was to be in the heart of the earth for three days and when he addressed the Jews he spoke obviously not of the Temple in Jerusalem which he had just purified but of himself. But why did he refer to himself as the temple? It requires only a little perspective on his ministry and identity to

obtain the answer. The Jews wanted him to prove that he was the Messiah and to do this they expected him to show by signs that he was greater than all the other prophets. In his answer Jesus set out to show them that he was no ordinary prophet. The Temple in Jerusalem contained only the presence of a manifestation of the glory of God, but of Jesus we are told:

In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell. He is the image of the invisible God. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily.

Colossians 1.19,15; 2.9

What Jesus was saying then was this: Destroy me, in whom the whole fulness of God dwells bodily, put me to death, and by raising myself from the dead three days later I will give you all the proof you will ever require that I am the Lord of this Temple, the house of God.

6. THE ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SIGN OF JONAH.

Now it becomes clear why Jesus gave the Jews this one sign, the Sign of the prophet Jonah. His death, burial and resurrection from the dead would surely prove to them that he was the Messiah.

We have seen already that the Jews sought a sign from heaven, a greater feat than that performed by any other prophet in history to prove his claims; and as one looks at the miracles of the former prophets one sees all the more the significance of the Sign of Jonah. As mentioned earlier, prior to the trial and arrest of Jesus his greatest sign was to raise Lazarus from the dead after he had been dead for four days. But this did not persuade the Jews (John 12. 911). Such things had been done during the time of the prophet Elisha.

But what greater feat can a man perform than to raise a dead man to life again? Only one possibly greater sign can be done. If that man after dying is able to raise himself from the dead and live again, this will surely be a greater sign and this sign was performed by no prophet before Jesus.

Living prophets had raised the dead but the sign Jesus was promising them was that the Messiah would raise himself from the dead. This is the Sign of Jonah. The Jews had stood at the foot of the cross mocking Jesus, "You who would destroy the Temple of God in three days", but they did not know that, after expiring a few hours later, Jesus would raise himself from the dead on the third day in overwhelming proof that he was indeed the Messiah and the ultimate temple of God, the one in whom the living God of all creation fully dwelt. As Jonah had come back from the stomach of a fish in the very depths of the sea to yet live on the earth, so Jesus was to die, be buried, only to raise himself to life on the third day. On one occasion Jesus made this quite plain to the Jews, saying:

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father".

John 10.17-18.

Not only did Jesus make it plain that he would raise himself from the dead on the third day but he also often showed that he was greater than all the prophets who had gone before him. When the Jews asked him "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" (John 8.53), Jesus made it plain that he was, saying that Abraham had looked forward to his day (John 8.56) and added, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8.58). In the same way a Samaritan woman said to him: "Are you greater than our father Jacob?" (John 4.12) to which Jesus replied that, whereas Jacob had left a well in the land of Samaria from which people could drink, only to thirst again, he could put within people a well of living water from which no one would ever thirst (John 4.14).

He showed that he was greater than Moses, for Moses had written of him (John 5.46). He was greater than David, for David, he said, "inspired by the Spirit, calls the Messiah Lord" (Matthew 22.43). He openly stated that he was greater than the prophets Solomon and Jonah (Luke 11.31,32) and that he was even greater than the very Temple of God (Matthew 12.6), for the Temple contained only a manifestation of God's presence but in him the whole fulness of God dwelt bodily.

No man had ever had greater wisdom than Solomon but Jesus is the very wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1.24). Jonah became a source of reprieve for the people of Nineveh but Jesus is the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Hebrews 5.9).

Although there had been many prophets, there was to be only one Messiah. And whereas the prophets had performed many signs, the Messiah reserved to himself the greatest sign of all. As Jonah's ordeal in the stomach of the fish in many ways foreshadowed this sign, namely the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, Jesus therefore set forth this sign alone as a proof that he was indeed the Messiah.

This leads us to consider in closing another statement made by Deedat in another booklet he once wrote, to the effect that there is no clearer statement of Jesus throughout the Gospels about his pending crucifixion than the Sign of Jonah (Deedat, *Was Christ Crucified?*, p.33). He made this remark during an attempt, similar to the one we have already considered in his booklet 'What was the Sign of Jonah?', to prove that Jesus came down alive from the cross, recuperated in his tomb, and somehow or other recovered his health.

Now if Jesus was taken down from the cross alive and survived only because he was so close to death that the Roman soldiers presumed he was dead, and managed through clandestine meetings with his disciples and various disguises to gradually recover (as Deedat claims), we may indeed ask, what sort of sign is this? If we are to take Deedat's contentions seriously, we must conclude that Jesus escaped death entirely by chance and recovered according to a natural process. This would not have been a miracle at all, let alone a sign greater than all the signs done by the prophets before him. Deedat's analysis of the Sign of Jonah thus leaves us without a sign at all!

On the other hand, if we take the narratives of the crucifixion in the Bible at face value and accept that Jesus died on the cross, only to raise himself from the dead on the third day, then we have indeed a sure sign and manifest proof that all his claims were true. Other living prophets had raised dead men to life but Jesus alone raised himself from the dead, and that to eternal life, for he ascended to heaven and has been there for nearly twenty centuries. It is in this alone that we find the true meaning of the Sign of Jonah and are able to perceive why Jesus singled it out as the only sign he was prepared to give to the Jews.

We see, therefore, that Deedat's final argument in favour of the theory that Jesus survived the cross is actually the very strongest evidence one can find against it. Although his booklets are thus easy to refute, the matter cannot be left here for the sign Jesus gave has implications for all men in all ages. As Jonah's sojourn in the stomach of a fish in the depths of the sea for three days authenticated his word to Nineveh, so the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ put the stamp of authenticity on his mission of salvation to all men in all ages. If you miss the import of this sign, Jesus gives you no other. No further proof that he is the Saviour of all men need be given to those who refuse to believe in him as their Lord and Saviour.

Nevertheless we have a wonderful assurance for those who perceive the meaning of this sign and who are prepared to believe in Jesus and follow him all their days as Saviour and Lord: just as no soul in repenting Nineveh perished, so neither will yours if you will commit your whole life to Jesus who died for you and rose from the dead on the third day that you too might live with him forever in the kingdom of heaven to be revealed when he returns to earth.

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

During 1978 Deedat published another booklet entitled 'Resurrection or Resuscitation?' which, like his booklet on the Sign of Jonah, attempts to prove that Jesus came down alive from the cross - a theory with no foundation in either the Bible or the Qur'an, one disowned by Christians and Muslims, and held to only by the Ahmadiyya sect which has been denounced as a non-Muslim cult in Pakistan.

Early on in this booklet, as in others he has written, Deedat promotes arguments which are based on nothing but his own ignorance of the Bible and to some extent of the English language. He speaks of a conversation he once had with a "reverend" and boldly says of Luke 3.23:

I explained that in the "most ancient" manuscripts of Luke, the words '(as was supposed)' are not there. (Deedat, *Resurrection or Resuscitation?*, p.7).

Very significantly he gives no authority for this statement and we are amazed at it for it is absolutely false. This man seems to think he can say what he likes about the Bible, no matter how factually absurd his statements are. Every manuscript of Luke's Gospel, including all the most ancient manuscripts, begins the genealogy of Jesus by saying that he was the son, as was supposed, of Joseph (meaning that he was not his actual son, having been born of his mother Mary alone). There is just simply no evidence for Deedat's fatuous claim. So much for his self-acclaimed knowledge of the Bible! We are sure discerning Muslims will have seen by now that this man is no true scholar of the Christian Scriptures.

He Appears to believe that the words quoted are missing from the oldest texts because they appear in brackets in some English translations. But any scholar will know that the use of brackets is a common form in the English language by which passing comments and personal notations are characterised. There are no such brackets in the Greek text but as the words in Luke 3.23 are clearly a comment, some translations place them in brackets. In the Revised Standard Version this form appears often where brackets are used for passages where no such brackets are used. in the original Greek simply because, like the Arabic of the Qur'an, such forms are not used in Greek to identify comments or personal remarks. (The same goes for inverted commas to identify a quotation. Inverted commas were used in neither classical Greek nor in classical Arabic). Examples are Acts 1.18-19, Romans 3.5, Galatians 1.20 and 2 Peter 2.8. Deedat's argument is based entirely on false premises and erroneous suppositions.

His attempts to prove that Luke 24.36-43 shows that Jesus must have come down alive from the cross are equally unfounded. He bases his whole argument on a complete misconception of Biblical teaching about the resurrection. It is widely accepted that every man has a body and a spirit. At death the body dies and the spirit leaves the body. The Bible teaches plainly that the body and spirit will again be united at the resurrection but that the bodies of true believers will be changed and that they will be raised in spiritual bodies (1 Corinthians 15.51-53). This means that the spirit will be clothed with a body that will reveal the true character of the spirit and will be eternal. Deedat, however, completely misunderstands this and erroneously takes "spiritualized" to mean that the body itself will not be raised from the dead and transformed but that the spirit alone will be "raised".

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after coming out of the tomb they were "startled and frightened and supposed that they saw a spirit" (Luke 24.37). Deedat argues that this means that they had believed that Jesus was dead and so thought it must be his ghost, but the Bible makes it plain why they were so amazed. The doors had been locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews and yet Jesus suddenly stood among them (John 20.19). Having been raised from the dead in a spiritualised body he could appear and disappear at will and was no longer bound by physical limitations (cf. also Luke 24.31, John 20.26).

Nevertheless, because Jesus called on the disciples to handle him and because he ate a piece of a fish before them (Luke 24.39-43), Deedat suggests that this shows that Jesus had not risen from the dead. He bases this argument on the assumption that a spiritualised body cannot be material in any way but must only be a spirit. He argues that Jesus was trying to show his disciples that he had therefore not risen from the dead and says:

He is telling them in the clearest language humanly possible that he is not what they were thinking. They were thinking that he was a spirit, a resurrected body, one having been brought back from the dead. He is most emphatic that he is not!

(Deedat, *Resurrection or Resuscitation?*, p.11).

So, according to Deedat, Jesus is stating in the "clearest language humanly possible" that he had not been raised from the dead. Yet, in the very next thing that Jesus said to his disciples, we find him stating quite plainly that this was in fact precisely what had happened - that he had indeed been raised from the dead. He said to them:

"Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations".

Luke 24.46-47.

In the "clearest language humanly possible", therefore, we find that Jesus told his disciples immediately after eating before them that he had just fulfilled the prophecies of the former prophets that he should rise from the dead on the third day. So once again we find Deedat's argument falling to the ground and that purely because he is not a genuine scholar of the Bible and has no reasonable grasp of Biblical theology.

The Bible plainly teaches that it is the body itself - a material substance - that will be raised at the resurrection (see Jesus' own teaching in John 5.28-29), but that it will be transformed. Today two men can be ploughing the same field. If they are identical twins it will be almost impossible to tell them apart. Yet the one may be righteous and the other wicked (Matthew 24.40). The difference is not outwardly apparent but it will be in the resurrection. A spiritualised body means that the condition of the body will be determined by the state of the spirit. If the man is righteous, his body will shine like the sun (Matthew 13.43); if he is wicked he will not be able to hide his rottenness as he can do now, but it will be exposed in all its misery in the state of his body. This is what we mean when we say people will have "spiritualised bodies" in the resurrection. Note clearly that the resurrection thus leads to a spiritualised body and not just to a risen spirit. The Bible puts it like this:

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

1 Corinthians 15.42-44.

It is the body itself that is buried in a perishable state and it is the same body that is raised imperishable. This passage shows quite plainly that it is the same physical body, buried as a seed - is sown into the ground, which will be raised as a spiritual body. This is plain Biblical teaching which Deedat so obviously misrepresents.

In 2 Corinthians 5.1-4 the Bible again makes it clear that it is not the wish of true believers to become exposed spirits without bodies. Rather they long for their mortal bodies to be replaced by spiritual bodies which are immortal.

Once again we find that Deedat's efforts to discredit Christianity come purely from suppositions based on his own inadequate knowledge of the Bible, and he appears to be one of those who are guilty of "reviling in matters of which they are ignorant" (2 Peter 2.12). Jesus' own statement that he had appeared in fulfilment of the prophecies that the Messiah would rise from the dead on the third day shows quite plainly that there is no foundation whatsoever for Deedat's attempts to prove that Jesus had come down alive from the cross.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day and in his own body ascended to heaven not long thereafter. He has gone to prepare a place for those who love him and who will follow him all their days as Lord and Saviour of their lives. When he returns he will raise them too from the dead and will clothe them with immortal bodies, granting them access to his eternal kingdom which he waits to reveal at the last time. True Christians can confidently say:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Philippians 3.20-21.

WHO MOVED THE STONE?

During 1977 Deedat also published a small booklet which plagiarised the title of a book written by Frank Morison entitled 'Who Moved the Stone?' Much of this booklet attempts once again to prove the theory that Jesus came down alive from the cross, and as we have already seen that this theory has no substance, it does not seem necessary to deal at any length with the points Deedat raises to promote it. We need only show, yet again, that he has had to resort to obvious absurdities to try and make his theory stick.

For example, he endeavours to prove that Mary Magdalene must have been looking for a live Jesus when she came to anoint his body. Although anointing a body was part of the normal burial custom of the Jews, he cannot accept this as it refutes his argument, so he suggests that the body of Jesus would have already been rotting within if he had died on the cross, saying "if we massage a rotting body, it will fall to pieces" (Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.3), even though Mary came to the tomb only some thirty-nine hours after Jesus had died. It is absolute scientific nonsense to say that a body will fall to pieces within forty-eight hours of a man's decease! If there was any merit in his argument, Deedat would hardly have found it necessary to resort to such a ridiculous statement.

He likewise has to overlook obvious probabilities when he says that, when Mary Magdalene sought to take away the body of Jesus (John 20.15), she could only have been thinking of helping him to walk away and could not have intended to carry away a corpse. He claims that she was a "frail Jewess" who could not carry "a corpse of at least a hundred and sixty pounds, wrapped with another 'hundred pounds weight of aloes and myrrh' (John 19.39) making a neat bundle of 260 pounds" (Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.8).

There is a far more probable explanation for Mary's statement that she would carry away the body of Jesus. There is nothing to say that she intended to carry it away all by herself. When she first found the body removed from the tomb she rushed to Jesus' disciples Peter and John and told them:

"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we do not know where they have laid him".

John 20.2

The other Gospels make it plain that Mary was not alone when she first went to the tomb that Sunday morning and that among the women who accompanied her were Joanna and Mary the mother of James (Luke 24.10). This is why she said "WE do not know where they have laid him". As it was only after Peter and John had gone to the tomb that she first saw Jesus there is no reason to suppose that she did not intend to enlist the help of these two disciples or of the other women to help her carry the body away.

In any event there is concrete evidence in the Bible that Mary Magdalene believed that Jesus had risen from the dead and this brings us to the whole theme of Deedat's booklet, namely "who moved the stone?". His conclusion is that it was removed by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two of Jesus' disciples who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. He says in his booklet:

It was Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, the two stalwarts who did not leave the Master in the lurch when he was most in need. These two had given to Jesus a Jewish burial (?) bath, and wound the sheets with the 'aloes and myrrh', and temporarily moved the stone into place, if at all; they were the same two real friends who removed the stone, and took their shocked Master soon after dark, that same Friday night to a more congenial place in the immediate vicinity for treatment.

(Deedat, *Who Moved the Stone?*, p.12).

He begins his booklet with an expression of hope that he would be able to give "a satisfactory answer to this problem" (p.1) and the cover of his booklet carries a comment by Dr. G.M. Karim which describes the moving of the stone as a "problem besetting the minds of all thinking Christians". The impression is thus given that the Bible is silent on this subject and that Christians are beset with a problem and have to speculate as to who moved the stone. This is sheer nonsense for the Bible plainly says (to use Deedat's words, in the "clearest language humanly possible"):

An angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone, and sat upon it.

Matthew 28.2

Can there really be any "problem" about this matter? Is it too hard to believe that an angel from heaven could roll back the stone? According to the Bible it took just two angels to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19.13) and it took only one angel to wipe out Sennacherib's whole army of a hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers (2 Kings 19.35). On another occasion a single angel stretched forth his hand to destroy the whole city of Jerusalem before the Lord called on him to stay his hand (2 Samuel 24.16). So it should surprise no one to read that it was an angel who moved the stone.

The Qur'an plainly states that all faithful Muslims must not only believe in Allah but also in the mala'ikah, the angels (Surah 2.285), and one of the six major tenets of a Muslim's iman is belief in angels. Not only so, but the Qur'an agrees that the angels who came to Abraham and Lot, told them that they had come to destroy the city where Lot dwelt (Surah 29.31-34), named as Sodom in the Bible.

The Qur'an therefore imposes on Muslims not only belief in angels but also in their awesome power over the affairs of men and the substance of the earth. No Muslim can therefore sincerely object to the statement in the Bible that it was an angel who moved the stone. Why then does Deedat overlook this plain statement in the Bible and falsely suggest that the identity of the person who moved the stone is a "problem"? Why is there no mention in his booklet of the verse which plainly states that it was an angel who moved the stone? The reason is that his theory that Jesus was taken down alive from the cross and that Mary was looking for a live Jesus is flatly contradicted by what this same angel immediately said to Mary:

"Do not be afraid; for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. Lo, I have told you".

Matthew 28.5-7.

The angel plainly told Mary and the other women to tell the disciples that Jesus, who had been crucified, had also now risen from the dead. They immediately fled from the tomb with "trembling and astonishment" (Mark 16.8). If they had thought that Jesus had survived the cross they would have been anything but surprised to find him gone from the tomb. But they had come to find a dead body and were absolutely amazed to find an angel telling them in the "clearest language humanly possible" that Jesus had risen from the dead.

So we find that Deedat not only has to promote absurdities to support his arguments but also has to suppress plain statements in the Bible which refute them completely. We urge all Muslims to read the Bible itself and to discover its wonderful truths instead of reading Deedat's booklets which so obviously pervert its teaching and promote alternatives that are full of absurdities as this booklet has constantly shown.

THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

by John Gilchrist

A Study of the Qur'an and the Bible

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A Study of the Qur'an and the Bible

Most Muslims do not believe that it is becoming of a true Muslim to condemn another man's religion. Certain exceptions to this rule exist, however, one of whom is Ahmed Deedat who regularly attacks Christians and their religion in a spirit reminiscent of the Crusades of old. One of his recent efforts to condemn Christianity is his booklet entitled "Is the Bible God's Word?", first published by his Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban in 1980.

In this publication Deedat endeavours to prove that the Bible cannot be the Word of God. To the ignorant and unlearned his treatise may appear to be impressive, if not convincing, but those who have any real knowledge of the texts and textual history of the Qur'an and the Bible will see through his petty efforts immediately.

It seems that Deedat is well aware of the inherent weakness of his case and, to cover it up, has resorted to bold and challenging statements to give the impression that a convincing and unanswerable dissertation is before the reader's eyes. In a report on a symposium Deedat was once involved in, A.S.K. Joommal said: "Even if one's case is weak and untenable, it is possible for one's oratorical prowess to carry one through and sway the multitudes in one's favor."

We know Joommal has relied on this very method in his book "The Bible: Word of God or Word of Man?", referred to by Deedat (on pp. 44 and 51), and it certainly appears that Deedat himself has resorted to this same tactic in his booklet against the Bible. Both of them are obviously acutely and painfully aware of the "untenable" nature of their supposed case against our Holy Scriptures.

Deedat audaciously suggests, on page 14 of his booklet, that if a Muslim should ever hand his publication to a missionary or Jehovah's Witnesses and request a written reply, he will never see them ever again - let alone ever get a reply.

We Christians are somewhat tired of the efforts this man has made over the years to discredit our faith but, to dispel the fond illusion that his booklet will chase any missionary back to his home for good, we have decided to formulate the reply he has requested. We have replied to other publications he has produced in the past and note with interest that, whereas we are always able to refute his assaults, he invariably proves incapable of saying anything further in reply to us. This seems to prove a point.

1. "THREE GRADES OF EVIDENCE".

Deedat begins his booklet with quotes from two Christian authors, Scroggie and Cragg, to the effect that there is a positive human element in the Bible. He then boldly concludes:

Both these doctors of religion are telling us in the clearest language humanly possible that the Bible is the handiwork of man. (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?* p. 2).

What he subtly omits to do, however, is to inform his readers, firstly, that the Christian Church has always held that the Word of God was written by men under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1. 20-21), and, secondly, that these authors were not "letting the cat out of the bag" (as Deedat fondly imagines) but were setting out to show how God has in fact revealed his Word.

Deedat's quote from Cragg's "The Call of the Minaret" is very astutely wrenched from its context. Cragg speaks of the human element in the Bible to demonstrate a decisive advantage that the Bible enjoys over the Qur'an. Whereas the Qur'an is alleged to be free of any human element, in the Bible God has deliberately chosen to reveal his Word through the writings of his inspired prophets and apostles so that his Word may not only be conveyed to man but may be communicated to his understanding and powers of comprehension as well. The apostle not only receives the Word of God but is able himself, infallibly inspired by the Holy Spirit, to convey its meaning to his readers. This the Qur'an cannot do if it has no human element as is generally alleged.

Deedat then ingeniously divides the Bible into "three different kinds of witnessing" (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 4), namely the Word of God, Words of a Prophet of God and Words of an Historian. He then quotes passages where God speaks, others where Jesus speaks, and lastly where things are said of Jesus, proudly suggesting that the Muslims are careful to separate these three. He states that the Qur'an alone has the Word of God, the Hadith has the Words of the Prophet, and other books have the writings of historians. He concludes by saying:

The Muslim keeps the above three types of evidence jealously apart, in their proper gradations of authority. He never equates them. (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 6).

We find it most astonishing that a man who poses as a scholar of Islam should make such a claim. He must surely know that there is no truth in his statement at all. Firstly the Qur'an contains many passages which record the words of the prophets of God. For example, we read that Zakariya, the prophet said:

How can I have a son when age hath overtaken me already and my wife is barren? Surah 3.40

If, as Deedat suggests, the Qur'an only contains the Word of God while the words of prophets are only found in the Hadith, it is extremely difficult to see how these words can ever be attributed to God! Secondly there is a passage in the Qur'an which clearly contains the words of angels to Muhammad and not the Word of God to him as is generally alleged:

We come not down save by commandment of thy Lord. Unto him belongeth all that is before us and all that is behind us and all that is between these two, and thy Lord was never forgetful. Surah 19.64

There is no hint in the Qur'an as to who is speaking but these words are clearly addressed to Muhammad directly by their authors. From the text itself it is quite clear that these are the words of angels and not of God.

Furthermore we find in the Hadith many words which are not the words of any prophet but obviously of God himself. These sayings are known as Hadith-i- Qudsi (divine sayings) and here is an example:

Abu Huraira reported that Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) said: Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, said: I have prepared for my pious servants which eye has seen not, and the ear has heard not and no human heart has perceived such bounties leaving aside those about which Allah has informed you. (Sahih Muslim, Vol.4, p. 1476).

The Hadith are full of such sayings. Furthermore much of the Qur'an and Hadith read like the passages in the Bible which are alleged to be the words of an historian. The passage in the Qur'an which relates the birth of Jesus from his mother Mary reads precisely like the "third type" quoted in Deedat's booklet:

And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of a palm tree. Surah 19. 22-23.

What the Qur'an says here of Mary is no different in narrative form to what Mark 11.13 says of Jesus. Nevertheless Deedat, using this verse in Mark as an example, says such narratives are not found in the Qur'an!

We must conclude that Deedat's effort to distinguish between the Qur'an and the Bible is founded on totally false premises. The Qur'an has the words of prophets and historical narratives throughout its pages and no one can honestly say that it contains the alleged words of God alone. Furthermore the Hadith also contain alleged sayings of God as well as those of prophets. When Deedat says that these three types of evidence - words of God, prophets and historians - are kept "jealously apart" by the Muslims, he makes a blatantly false statement - one typical of the many we find in his booklet.

It is apparent right from the outset that Deedat's arguments against the Bible are unjustified and the trend continues right through his booklet.

2. THE "MULTIPLE BIBLE VERSIONS".

Deedat begins his third chapter by denying that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures constituting the Holy Bible are those honoured by the Qur'an as the Taurat and Injil respectively (the Law and the Gospel - i.e., the Old and New Testaments). Instead he suggests that the real Taurat and Injil were different books entirely which were allegedly revealed to Moses and Jesus respectively.

This attempt to distinguish between the books of the Holy Bible and those referred to in the Qur'an is, to say the least, very difficult to consider with any seriousness. No matter how widely this view may be held in the Muslim world, there is no evidence of any nature whatsoever to support it.

At no time in history has there ever been any proof that books as such were "revealed" to Moses and Jesus, or that any other Taurat (Law) or Injil (Gospel) other than the books of the Old and New Testaments ever existed. Furthermore, as we shall show, the Qur'an itself does not distinguish these books from the Holy Scriptures of the

Jews and the Christians but, on the contrary, openly admits that they are those books which the Jews and Christians themselves hold to be the Word of God.

Significantly, in trying to establish his theory that the Taurat and Injil were books other than those found in the Bible, Deedat has to resort inevitably to pure subjectivism. He bleats We Muslims believe ... we believe ... we sincerely believe ... but is incapable of producing even the slightest degree of evidence in favour of these beliefs. Surprisingly he proves to be guilty of the very "mulish mentality" he wrongly attributes to Christians in his booklet (see p. 3).

All we can say in response to these stated beliefs is that all the evidence of history weighs irreversibly against them and that they are accordingly purely speculative and devoid of any foundation whatsoever.

In passing, however, we must comment that, in the light of Deedat's claim that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved and protected from human tampering by God himself for fourteen centuries (Is the Bible God's Word? p. 7), it is rather astonishing to discover that the same God proved singularly incapable of preserving even a record of the fact that such a Taurat or an Injil ever even existed - let alone preserve the books themselves! We find such a paradox fundamentally impossible to believe - for the Eternal Ruler of the universe will surely act consistently at all times. You cannot expect us to believe that God has miraculously preserved one of his books perfectly for centuries and yet proved absolutely powerless to preserve independently in human history even so much as a record that other such books ever existed. We find this too hard to swallow.

In any event, as we have seen already, the Qur'an itself unambiguously confirms that the Taurat of the Jews was the book regarded as such by them at the time of Muhammad and that the Injil likewise was the book in the possession of the Christians at that time which they themselves considered to be the Word of God. At no time in history have Jews and Christians ever regarded any books as the sacred Word of God other than those constituting the Old and New Testaments as we know them today.

At the time of Muhammad the Jews universally knew only one Taurat - the books of the Old Testament precisely as they are today. So at the same time the Christians knew only one Injil - the books of the New Testament exactly as they are found today. Useful Qur'anic texts proving the point are:

How come they unto thee for judgment when they have the Torah wherein Allah hath revealed judgment ? Surah 5.43

Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah hath revealed therein. Surah 5.47

It is impossible to consider how the Christians of Muhammad's time could ever judge by the Gospel (Injil) if they were not in possession of it. In Surah 7.157 the Qur'an again admits that the Taurat and Injil were in possession of the Jews and Christians at the time of Muhammad and that they were those books which these two groups themselves accepted as the Law and the Gospel respectively. No one can honestly say that these two books were other than those of the Old and New Testaments as they are found in the Bible today.

Furthermore it is most significant to note that distinguished commentators like Baidawi and Zamakshari openly admit that Injil is not an original Arabic word but is borrowed from the Syriac word used by the Christians themselves to describe the Gospel. Indeed, whereas some early Qur'anic scholars tried to find an Arabic origin for it, these two men of authority rejected the theory with undisguised contempt (Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an, p. 71). This substantiates all the more the conclusion that the Injil was not a phantom book revealed as such to Jesus, all trace of which has strangely disappeared, but rather the New Testament itself precisely as we know it today. The same can be said for the Taurat as the word is obviously of Hebrew origin and is the title which the Jews themselves have always given to the books of the Old Testament as we know it today.

Therefore the Qur'an unreservedly admits that the Bible itself is the true Word of God. Deedat knows this for a fact and therefore tries to circumvent the implications by suggesting that there are "multiple" Bible versions in circulation today. This is a very artful misrepresentation of the truth.

He fails to inform his readers that he is really referring to different English translations of the Bible which are widely distributed in the world today. He speaks of the King James Version (KJV), Revised Version (RV), and Revised Standard Version (RSV) but, in the name of honesty, he should have made it clear that these are not differing editions of the Bible itself but simply different English translations of it. All three are based on the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments respectively which have been preserved intact by the Christian Church since centuries before the time of Muhammad. We shall presently consider the differences between them but it will be useful to refer here to a furore which raged among the Muslim leaders of South Africa in 1978 over the distribution of an English translation of the Qur'an by Muhammad Asad. (As with the Bible, there are numerous different translations of the Qur'an in English as well).

Reaction against Asad's translation was so vehement that the Islamic Council of South Africa, in a public statement, openly discouraged distribution of this book among the Muslims of South Africa. At no time has any English translation of the Bible ever been treated so drastically. Therefore readers must not be duped by Deedat's suggestion that "multiple" versions of the Bible exist and should appreciate immediately that he is pulling the wool over his readers' eyes when he suggests that the Christian Church does not have just one Bible.

3. THE APOCRYPHA.

Deedat then proceeds to make another blatantly false charge when he suggests that the Protestants have bravely expunged seven whole books from the Bible (Is the Bible God's Word?, p. 9), the books being those that constitute the Apocrypha. It seems that there is very poor information about the Bible at Deedat's disposal for these books are of Jewish origin and the authors never intended to write Scripture, nor have they ever formed part of the Jewish Holy Scriptures, the Old Testament, which we Christians accept as the Word of God. Therefore they have not been expunged from the Bible as Deedat erroneously suggests. Only the Roman Catholics, for reasons best known to themselves, give them the authority of Scripture.

4. THE "GRAVE DEFECTS".

With his customary aggressiveness Deedat then challenges the believing Christian to steel himself for the unkindest blow of all as though what he was about to say was entirely unknown to us. He quotes these words from the preface to the RSV which are underlined in his booklet:

Yet the King James Version has grave defects... these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision. (Deedat, s the Bible God's Word?, p. 11).

These "defects" are nothing but a number of variant readings which were generally unknown to the translators who composed the KJV early in the seventeenth century. The RSV of this century has identified these readings and they are noted as footnotes on the relevant pages of its text. Furthermore, where a verse like 1 John 5.7 appears in the KJV (because the translators took it from later manuscripts), the RSV has omitted it altogether (as it is not found in the oldest texts of the New Testament in the original Greek).

Firstly, we must again point out that the KJV and RSV are English translations of the original Greek texts and that these texts, as they are preserved for us, have in no way been changed. (We have about 4000 Greek texts dating back to not less than two hundred years before Muhammad and Islam).

Secondly, there is no material alteration of any form in the structure, teaching or doctrine of the Bible in the revised translation referred to. Throughout the KJV, the RSV, and other English translations, the essence and substance of the Bible is totally unchanged.

Thirdly, these are not differing versions of the Bible. We have heard it said that there is only "one Qur'an" whereas Christians have different versions of the Bible. This is a totally false comparison for these "versions" of the Bible are, it needs again be said, only English translations of the original Hebrew and Greek texts. There are many such English translations of the Qur'an as well but no one suggests that these are "different versions" of the Qur'an. In the same way we have many English translations but, as a cursory comparison of these will immediately show, we have just one Bible.

We freely admit that there are variant readings in the Bible. We believe, as Christians, in being entirely honest at all times and our consciences do not allow us to avoid the facts, nor do we believe anything can sincerely be achieved in pretending such variants do not exist.

On the contrary we do not consider that these variant readings prove that the Bible has been changed as such. The effect they have on the book is so slight and, indeed, so negligible that we know we can confidently assert that the Bible, as a whole, is intact and has never been changed in any way.

We have never ceased to be amazed, however, at the general Muslim claim that the Qur'an has never been changed whereas the Bible has allegedly been so corrupted that it is no longer what it was and therefore cannot be regarded as the Word of God. All the evidence history has bequeathed to us in respect of the textual history of the Qur'an and the Bible suggests, rather, that both books are remarkably intact in the form in which they were originally written but that neither has escaped the presence, here and there, of variant readings in the text. We can only presume that the fond illusion of Qur'anic inerrancy and Biblical corruption is the figment of pure expediency, a convenient way - indeed, as the evidence shows, a desperate and drastic way - of explaining away the fact that the Taurat and Injil are actually Christian rather than Islamic in content and teaching. Whatever the reason for this myth, we know we speak the truth when we say that the suggestion that the Qur'an is unchanged while the Bible has been changed on many occasions is the greatest lie ever proclaimed in the name of truth.

It is time the Muslim doctors of religion in the world told their pupils and students the truth. There is abundant evidence that, when the Qur'an was first collated by the Caliph Uthman into one standard text, there were numerous texts in existence which all contained a host of variant readings. During his reign reports were brought to him that, in various parts of Syria, Armenia and Iraq, Muslims were reciting the Qur'an in a way different to that in which those in Arabia were reciting it. Uthman immediately called for the manuscript of the Qur'an which was in the possession of Hafsa (one of the wives of Muhammad and the daughter of Umar) and ordered Zaid-b-Thabit and three others to make copies of the text and to correct it wherever necessary. When these were complete we read that Uthman took drastic action regarding the other manuscripts of the Qur'an in existence:

Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.6, p. 479).

At no time in Christian history has anyone attempted to standardize just one copy of the Bible as the true one while attempting to have all the others destroyed. Why did Uthman make such an order regarding the other Qur'ans in circulation? We can only presume that he believed that they contained "grave defects" - so "many and so serious as to call" not for revision but for wholesale destruction. In other words, if we assess the textual history of the Qur'an just at this point, we find that the Qur'an standardized as the correct one is that which a man (and not God), according to his own discretion (and not by revelation), decreed to be the true one. We fail to see on what grounds this copy was regarded as the only perfect one available and will shortly produce evidence that the codex of Ibn Mas'ud had a far greater claim to be the best one available. (Indeed not one could seriously be regarded as perfect in the light of the many differences between them).

It is practically certain that there was not one Qur'an in existence which agreed with Hafsa's copy in every detail for all other copies were ordered to be burnt. This kind of evidence most certainly does not in any way back up the fallacy that the Qur'an has never been changed in any way.

Firstly, there is incontrovertible evidence that even this one "Revised Standard Version" of the Qur'an was anything but perfect. In the most accredited works of Islamic tradition we read that even after these copies were sent out the same Zaid recalled a verse which was missing. He testified:

A verse from Surat Ahzab was missed by me when we copied the Qur'an and I used to hear Allah's Apostle reciting it. So we searched for it and found it with Khuzaima-bin-Thabit al Ansari. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.6, p. 479).

The verse was Surah 33.23. Therefore, if the evidence is to be believed (and there is none to the contrary), there was not one Qur'an at the time of Uthman's recension which was perfect.

Secondly, there is similar evidence that, to this day, verses and, indeed, whole passages are still omitted from the Qur'an. We are told that Umar in his reign as Caliph stated that certain verses prescribing stoning for adultery were recited by Muhammad as part of the Qur'an in his lifetime:

God sent Muhammad and sent down the Scripture to him. Part of what he sent down was the passage on stoning, we read it, we were taught it, and we heeded it. The apostle stoned and we stoned them after him. I fear that in time to come men will say that they find no mention of stoning in God's book and thereby go astray in neglecting an ordinance which God has sent down. Verily stoning in the book of God is a penalty laid on married men and women who commit adultery. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 684).

Here is clear evidence that the Qur'an, as it stands today, is still not "perfect" as the verse about stoning of adulterers remains absent from the text. Elsewhere in the Hadith we find further evidence that certain verses and passages once formed part of the Qur'an but are now omitted from its text. It is quite clear, therefore, that the *textus receptus* of the Qur'an in the world today is not the *textus originalis*.

Going back to the texts which were marked for the fire, however, we find that in every case there were considerable differences between these and the text which Uthman decided, according to his own discretion, to standardize as the best text of the Qur'an. Furthermore these differences were not purely dialectal, as is often suggested. In many cases we find that they were "real textual variants and not mere dialectal peculiarities" (Jeffery, *The Qur'an as Scripture*).

In some cases there were consonantal variants in certain words, in others the variants concerned whole clauses, and here and there words and sentences were found in some codices that were omitted in others. There were some fifteen different codices affected by these differences.

We shall now consider the text of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud. (What can be said of his codex generally applies to the others destroyed by Uthman's command as well). His text was regarded by the local community at Kufa as their official recension of the Qur'an and when Uthman first sent out the order that all the texts besides that in Hafsa's possession were to be burnt, for some time Ibn Mas'ud refused to relinquish his codex and it rivaled the codex of Hafsa as the official text.

Ibn Mas'ud was one of the very first Muslims and also one of the earliest teachers among those who taught the reading and recitation of the Qur'an. Indeed he was widely regarded as being one of the best authorities on its text. On one occasion he recited more than seventy surahs of the Qur'an in Muhammad's presence and no one found fault with his recitation (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p. 1312). Indeed in the same highly respected collection of traditions of Imam Muslim we read:

Masruq reported: They made mention of Ibn Mas'ud before Abdullah b. Amr whereupon he said: He is a person whose love is always fresh in my heart after I heard Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four persons: from Ibn Mas'ud, Salim, the ally of Abu Hudhaifa, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Mu'adh b. Jabal. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.4, p. 1313).

According to another work of Hadith, this same Ibn Mas'ud was present when Muhammad allegedly reviewed the Qur'an with Gabriel each year (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol.2, p. 441). In a similar tradition we read that Muhammad said:

Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four: from Abdullah bin Mas'ud [he started with him], Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, Mu'adh bin Jabal, and Ubai bin Ka'b. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.5, pp. 96-97).

The words in square brackets are the comment of the reporter of the tradition, namely Masruq. They show that, of all Muslims at that time, Ibn Mas'ud was the foremost authority on the Qur'an.

Records of many variant readings in the codices of both Salim and Ubai bin Ka'b exist but, as Ibn Mas'ud was especially singled out before the others by Muhammad himself, it is astonishing to discover that his text varied from the others (including Hafsa's) so often that the different readings involved are set out in no less than ninety pages of Arthur Jeffery's collection of variants in the various codices (Cf. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an*, pp. 24-114). The author has taken his evidence from numerous Islamic sources which are

documented in his book. There are no less than 19 cases in Surah 2 alone where his text differed from the others in circulation, in particular the text of Hafsa.

Furthermore one of the reasons he gave for refusing to abandon his codex in favour of Hafsa's was that the latter text was compiled by Zaid-b-Thabit who was still only in the loins of an unbeliever when he had already become one of the closest companions of Muhammad.

Two things emerge from all this. Firstly, it appears that the text of Ibn Mas'ud had far better grounds than that of Hafsa for being the best text of the Qur'an available - in particular as Muhammad had considered him to be the first of the four best authorities on the Qur'an. Secondly, there were voluminous textual variants between the two texts - literally thousands which are all, without exception, documented in Jeffery's book.

Allowing further for the fact that there were about a dozen other primary codices of prominent men like Salim and Ubai bin Ka'b and that these differed radically from Hafsa's text as well (often agreeing with the text of Ibn Mas'ud instead!), we must conclude that the evidence available totally negates the fond illusion that there is no proof that the Qur'an has never been changed. Jeffery's book contains 362 pages of incontrovertible evidence that the foremost codices of the Qur'an in those all-important early days differed widely from one another in many respects. Therefore the Qur'an, too, has suffered from variant readings and in no way can any man with an honest conscience before God suggest that the Qur'an is free from the "grave defects" found in the textual history of the Bible. This is a fallacy expediently propagated in astonishing defiance of the cold facts to the contrary.

The truth is that the textual history of the Qur'an is very similar to that of the Bible (Guillaume, Islam, p. 58). Both books have been preserved remarkably well. Each is, in its basic structure and content, a very fair record of what was originally there. But neither book has been preserved totally without error or textual defect. Both have suffered here and there from variant readings in the early codices known to us but neither has in any way been corrupted. Sincere Christians and Muslims will honestly acknowledge these facts.

The only difference between the Qur'an and the Bible today is that the Christian Church has, in the interests of truth, carefully preserved the variant readings that exist in the Biblical text whereas the Muslims at the time of Uthman deemed it expedient to destroy as far as possible all evidences of different readings of the Qur'an in the cause of standardizing one text for the whole of the Muslim world. There may well be only one text of the Qur'an in circulation today, but no one can honestly claim that it is exactly that which Muhammad handed down to his companions. No one has ever shown why Hafsa's text deserved to be regarded as infallible and the evidence, on the contrary, suggests that Ibn Mas'ud's text had a far greater right to be regarded as the best available. These facts must also always be considered against the background of further evidence in the Hadith that the Qur'an today is still not complete.

It does not help to say that all Qur'ans in the world today are the same. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link - and the weak link in the chain of the textual history of the Qur'an is found right at this point where, in those crucial early days, different and differing codices of the Qur'an existed and other evidence was given that the text finally standardized as the best one was still far from being complete or in any way perfect.

Only those who have neither love for truth nor respect for valid evidences will claim that the Bible has been corrupted while the Qur'an is allegedly unchanged. Such men may fondly imagine that the cause of their faith is being greatly served with such distortions of truth. But God, who is true and who loves the truth, will assuredly set his face against their questionable propaganda.

5. FIFTY THOUSAND ERRORS?

Deedat then produces a reproduction of a page from a magazine entitled Awake dating back some twenty-three years published by the Jehovah's Witnesses (a non-Christian minority cult) which quotes a secular magazine Look to the effect that there are some "modern students" who "say" that there are probably "50,000 errors in the Bible".

Very significantly no mention is made of the identity of these so-called modern students, nor is even the slightest evidence given of just a sample of this alleged abundance of errors. We can only presume that this allegation is purely rhetorical and stems from excessive prejudice against the Bible and all that it teaches.

Unfortunately those who share this prejudice willy-nilly swallow anything they read against the Bible - no matter how far-fetched or absurd it may be. In the same way Deedat takes as established fact any charge he reads against the Bible without the slightest effort to verify it. We find it hard to take him seriously when he says:

We do not have the time and space to go into the tens of thousands of - grave or minor - defects that the authors of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) have attempted to revise. (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?* p. 14).

What he means is that he does not know of tens of thousands of errors in the Bible. Of these alleged fifty thousand defects he produces just four for our consideration. Now we must presume that a man with such an alleged wealth of errors at his disposal will be able to provide, in just four cases, very substantial evidence of total corruption in the Bible. We are also surely entitled to presuppose that these four examples will be the very best he can produce. Let us examine them.

a). The first - and presumably foremost - "error" in the Bible is allegedly found in Isaiah 7.14:

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7.14 (KJV).

In the RSV we read instead of the word virgin that a young woman would conceive and bear a son. According to Deedat, this is supposed to be one of the foremost errors in the Bible.

The word in the original Hebrew is *almah* - a word found in every Hebrew text of Isaiah. Therefore there is no change of any nature in the original text. The issue is purely one of interpretation and translation. The common Hebrew word for virgin is *bethulah* whereas *almah* refers to a young woman - and always an unmarried one. So the RSV translation is a perfectly good literal rendering of the word. But, as there are always difficulties translating from one language to another, and as a good translator will try to convey the real meaning of the original, most English translations translate the word as virgin. The reason is that the context of the word demands such an interpretation. (Muslims who have translated the Qur'an into English have often experienced similar problems with the original Arabic text. A literal rendering of a word or text may lose the implied meaning in the original language).

The conception of the child was to be a sign to Israel. Now there would be no sign in the simple conception of a child in the womb of an unmarried woman. Such a thing is commonplace throughout the world. The sign is clearly that a virgin would conceive and bear a son. That would be a real sign - and so it was when Jesus Christ fulfilled this prophecy by being conceived of the Virgin Mary.

Isaiah uses the word *almah* rather than *bethulah* because the latter word not only means a virgin but also a chaste widow (as in Joel 1.8). Those who translate it as a young woman (so the RSV) give a literal rendering of the word whereas those who translate it as virgin (so the KJV) give its meaning in its context. Either way the young woman was a virgin as Mary duly was when Jesus was conceived. The issue is purely one of translation and interpretation from the original Hebrew into English. It has absolutely nothing to do with the textual integrity of the Bible as such. So Deedat's first point falls entirely to the ground.

b). His second text is John 3.16 which reads in the King James Version as follows:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3.16

In the RSV we read that he gave his only Son and Deedat charges that the omission of the word "begotten" proves that the Bible has been changed. Once again, however, this is purely a matter of interpretation and translation for the original Greek word properly means unique. Either way there is no difference between "only Son" and "only begotten Son" for both are fair translations of the original Greek and make the same point: Jesus is the unique Son of God. (We cannot understand Deedat's claim that the RSV has brought the Bible nearer to the Qur'an which denies that Jesus is the Son of God. In the RSV the fact that he is indeed the unique Son of God

is emphasized in the same terms as in the KJV). We need to emphasize once again that there is no change in the original Greek text and that the issue is purely one of interpretation and translation. So Deedat's second point falls away as well.

To illustrate our point further we can refer to Deedat's quote from Surah 19.88 where we read that Christians say that God Most Gracious has begotten a Son. He has taken this from Yusuf Ali's translation of the Qur'an. Now in the translations of Pickethall, Muhammad Ali and Maulana Daryabadi, we do not find the word begotten but rather taken. If Deedat's line of reasoning is to be believed, then here is evidence that the Qur'an, too, has been changed!

We know our Muslim readers will immediately tell us that these are only English translations and that the original Arabic has not been changed even though the word "begotten" is not found in the other versions of the Qur'an. So we in turn plead with you to be quite realistic about this as well - nothing can be said against the integrity of the Bible just because the word "begotten", as in the Qur'an, is only found in one translation and not in another.

c). Deedat's third example is, we admit, one of the defects the RSV set out to correct. In 1 John 5.7 in the KJV we find a verse outlining the unity of the Father, Word and Holy Ghost which is omitted in the RSV. It appears that this verse was originally set out as a marginal note in an early text and that it was mistaken by later transcribers as part of the actual text. It is omitted in all modern translations because we now have older texts of greater authority where it is not found.

Deedat suggests that this verse is the closest approximation to what the Christians call their Holy Trinity in the encyclopedia called the BIBLE (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 16). If it was, or alternatively, if the whole doctrine of the Trinity was based on this one text alone, then indeed this would be a matter for very serious consideration. On the contrary any honest expositor of Biblical theology will freely admit - as all Catholics, Protestants and other Christians uniformly do - that the doctrine of the Trinity is the only doctrine of God that can be obtained from the teaching of the Bible as a whole. Indeed the following verse is a far closer approximation to and definition of the doctrine of the Trinity than the spurious verse

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 2.19

Only one, singular name of the three persons is referred to. In the Bible the word "name" used in such a context refers to the nature and character of the person or place so described. So Jesus speaks of only one name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - implying an absolute unity between them - and of only one name - implying a total similarity of character and essence. This verse is thoroughly Trinitarian in content and emphasis and therefore, as 1 John 5.7 merely endorses it, we do not see what effect the omission of this verse in modern translations has on Christian doctrine at all. Accordingly it is not worthy of any form of serious consideration.

d). His fourth point is such an outstanding fallacy that we marvel at his abysmal ignorance. He suggests that the "inspired" authors of the canonical Gospels did not record a single word about the ASCENSION of Jesus (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 19). This claim is made pursuant to a reference to two statements about the ascension of Jesus in the Gospels of Mark and Luke which the RSV has identified as being among the variant readings we have earlier referred to. Apart from these verses the Gospel writers allegedly make no reference of any nature whatsoever to the ascension. On the contrary we find that all four knew of it perfectly well. John has no less than eleven references to it. In his Gospel Jesus says:

I am ascending to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God. John 20.17

Luke not only wrote his Gospel but also the Book of Acts and in the latter book the first thing he mentions is the ascension of Jesus to heaven:

And when Jesus had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. Acts 1.9

Matthew and Mark regularly speak of the second coming of Jesus from heaven (see, e.g., Matthew 26. 64 and Mark 14.62). It is difficult to see how Jesus could come from heaven if he had not ascended there in the first place.

In conclusion we must point out that the passages Mark 16. 9-20 and John 8. 1-11 have not been expunged from the Bible and later restored as Deedat suggests. In the RSV translation they are now included in the text because scholars are persuaded that they are indeed part of the original text. The truth of the matter is that in our oldest scripts they are found in some texts and not in others. The RSV editors are not tampering with the Bible as Deedat has suggested - they are merely trying to bring our English translations as close as possible to the original texts - unlike the editors of Uthman's recension of the Qur'an who deemed it more expedient simply to destroy anything that varied in any way with their preferred text.

Finally it proves nothing to state that all the original manuscripts - those on which the books of the Bible were written for the first time - are now lost and have perished for the same is true of the very first texts of the Qur'an. The oldest text of the Qur'an still extant dates from the second century after the Hijrah and is compiled on vellum in the early al-ma'il Arabic script. Other early Qur'ans are in Kufic script and date from the same time as well.

6. "ALLAH" IN THE BIBLE?

On page 22 of his booklet 'Is the Bible God's Word?' Deedat reproduces a pamphlet allegedly showing that the Arabic word for God, Allah, is found in the Scofield translation of the Bible. Fortunately the evidence, in this case, is set before us to consider. A copy of a page from a Scofield Bible is reproduced and in a footnote we find that the Hebrew word for God, Elohim, is derived from two words, El (strength) and Alah (to swear). This last word is supposed to be proof that the Arabic word Allah is found in the Bible!

A more far-fetched and fanciful effort to prove a point can hardly be imagined. The word in Hebrew is alah, a common word meaning "to swear". How this is supposed to be proof that the word Allah in Arabic, meaning God, is found in the Bible is altogether unclear to us. Deedat's effort to twist the facts further in suggesting that Elah in Hebrew (meaning God) has been spelt by the editors of the Scofield translation alternatively as Alah (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 21) taxes our credulity to an unbearable extreme. These editors clearly identify the latter word as another one entirely meaning "to swear".

As if this was not enough, we are obliged to swallow even more of his unpalatable illogic when he suggests that the omission of the word Alah in the latest Scofield translation is proof that the word has been blotted out ... in the Bible of the orthodox! (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 21). What is quite clear is that it has been omitted from a footnote in a commentary and we cannot possibly see how this can be regarded as a change in the text of the Bible itself! Elsewhere Deedat claims that Christians may not consider any footnote as part of the Word of God itself (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 17). It is a great pity that this man cannot apply to himself the standards he demands from others.

It will be useful to point out here, however, that there is nothing unique about the word Allah nor must it be regarded as coming originally from the pages of the Qur'an. On the contrary it is quite clearly derived from the Syriac word Alaha (meaning "God") in common use among Christians in pre-Islamic times (cf. the authorities cited by Jeffery in *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, p. 66). It was also in common use among the Arabs before Islam as appears from the name of Muhammad's own father Abdullah (i.e., "servant of God" from abd, meaning "servant", and Allah, meaning "God"). It is also certain that Allah was the name used for God in pre-Islamic poetry (Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment*, p. 53). Accordingly there is nothing unique about the name at all. In the circumstances we really fail to see what Deedat is trying to prove or what his excitement is all about.

7. PARALLEL PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE.

We need not deal extensively with Deedat's chapter entitled "Damning Confessions" as these are nothing but honest admissions that the Bible has suffered textual errors such as those we have considered already. As we

have also seen that the Qur'an has also been beset with the same problems, we do not believe that there is any further obligation on us to treat this red-herring seriously.

We do marvel, however, at a grossly inaccurate statement by Deedat to the effect that "out of over four thousand differing manuscripts the Christians boast about, the church fathers just selected four which tallied with their prejudices and called them Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 24). Once again Deedat has exposed his appalling ignorance of his subject for these four thousand scripts are copies of the 27 books which constitute the New Testament. Hundreds of these are copies of the four Gospels referred to. Statements like these force us to conclude that the booklet written by Deedat cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a scholarly critique of the Bible but rather a vociferous tirade against it by a man whose ignorance is matched only by his extreme prejudice against it.

Such prejudice is openly exposed on the next page where he claims that the five books of Moses cannot be regarded as being the Word of God or of Moses because statements like these, *The Lord said unto Moses...*, in the third person, appear quite frequently. Because Deedat cannot consider even for a moment that Moses might well have chosen to describe himself in the third person, he claims that these words come from "a third person writing from hearsay" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 25).

If so, then the Qur'an too must fall away as being neither the Word of God nor that of a prophet but of a "third person writing from hearsay" for similar statements are found in its pages, e.g.:

When Allah saith: O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour unto thee. Surah 5.110

We cannot see any difference between the sayings where the word spoken to Moses in the Bible and where Allah spoke to Jesus in the Qur'an. Surely any criticism of the Biblical expression must rebound against the Qur'an as well.

Finally Moses obviously did not write his own obituary as Deedat implies. The 34th chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy was written by his successor, Joshua the prophet, who also wrote the book of the same name which immediately follows it.

Deedat's sixth chapter deals with the authenticity of the four Gospels. He begins by suggesting that internal evidence proves that Matthew was not the author of the first Gospel (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 26) purely because Matthew describes himself in his Gospel in the third person. We have already seen how feeble this line of reasoning is. God is alleged to be the author of the Qur'an yet he is described in it on numerous occasions in the third person. Once again we cannot see how a Muslim can seriously question the authorship of any book of the Bible purely because the author describes himself in the third person.

Furthermore a brief analysis of the reproduction of the introduction to the Gospel of Matthew by J.B. Phillips in Deedat's booklet proves very enlightening. Phillips says:

Early tradition ascribed this Gospel to the apostle Matthew, but scholars nowadays almost all reject this view. The author, whom we can still conveniently call Matthew, has plainly drawn on the mysterious "Q", which may have been a collection of oral traditions. (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 28).

Anyone who knows the meaning of the expression *sweet reason* will give thoughtful consideration to the following facts:

1. Early Christian tradition unanimously ascribed this Gospel to Matthew. The subjective beliefs of some "modern scholars" cannot seriously be weighed against the objective testimony of those who lived at the time when this Gospel was first copied and distributed. In any event we question very seriously the charge that almost all scholars reject the authorship of Matthew for this Gospel. It is only a particular school of scholars who do this - those who do not believe in the story of creation, who write off the story of Noah and the flood as a myth, and who scoff at the idea that Jonah ever spent three days in the stomach of a fish. We are sure our Muslim readers will know what to make of such "scholars". On the contrary those scholars who accept that these stories are historically true practically without exception also accept that Matthew was the author of this Gospel.

2. Phillips says that the author can still conveniently be called Matthew purely because there is no reasonable alternative to his authorship of this Gospel, nor has the history of the early Church ever suggested another author.

3. The mysterious "Q" is only mysterious because it is the figment of the imagination of modern "scholars". It is not a mystery - it is a myth. There is no evidence of an historical nature whatsoever that such a collection of oral traditions ever existed.

Finally we find it hard to give serious consideration to Deedat's complaints about the fact that Matthew copied from Mark and that a chapter in Isaiah 37 is repeated in 2 Kings 19. The reasoning behind his suggestion that such wholesale cribbing (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 29) rules out the possibility that the Bible is the Word of God is extremely hard to follow.

One only needs to know the background of the Gospel of Mark to see through the folly of Deedat's line of argument. The Church Father Papias has recorded for us the fact that the Apostle Peter was the source of information for Mark's Gospel.

Peter had far more first-hand information about the life of Jesus than Matthew. The former's conversion is described in chapter 4 of Matthew's Gospel whereas the conversion of the latter appears only in chapter 9 - long after many events witnessed by the Apostle Peter had already taken place.

Furthermore Peter was often with Jesus when Matthew was not: The former witnessed the transfiguration (Mark 9.2) and was present in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14.33) while Matthew was absent on both occasions.

Matthew could hardly have found a more reliable source for his Gospel and, as he copied from a Biblical, scriptural text, we cannot see how his Gospel can lose the stamp of authority or genuineness.

If Deedat could show that Biblical narratives such as those he produces had parallels in extra-Biblical works predating the Gospels, where such works were known to be collections of fables and fairy-stories, we would treat his points more seriously. On the contrary, while such parallels are obviously lacking in Biblical cases, there are many stories in the Qur'an, set forth as true to history, which have awkward parallels in pre-Islamic Jewish books of fables and fairy-tales. We shall consider just one example.

The Qur'an records the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Surah 5.27-32) which is also found in the Bible in the Book of Genesis. At one point, however, we find an unusual statement which has no parallel in the Bible:

Then Allah sent a raven scratching up the ground, to show him how to hide his brother's naked corpse. Surah 5.31

In a Jewish book of fables and folklore, however, we read that Adam wept for Abel and did not know what to do with his body until he saw a raven scratch in the ground and bury its dead companion. At this Adam decided to do as the raven had done. (Pirke Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 21).

In the Qur'an it is Cain who sees the raven and in the Jewish book it is Adam but, apart from this minor difference, the similarity between the stories is unmistakable. As the Jewish book predates the Qur'an it appears that Muhammad plagiarized the story and, with convenient adjustments, wrote it down in the Qur'an as part of the divine revelation! If this conclusion is to be resisted, we would like to be given sound reasons why it should be - especially when we consider the very next verse in the Qur'an which reads:

For that cause We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever killeth a human being for other than manslaughter or corruption in the earth, it shall be as if he had killed all mankind, and whoso saveth the life of one, it shall be as if he had saved the life of all mankind. Surah 5.32

At first sight this verse appears to have no connection with the preceding narrative. Why the life or death of one should be as the salvation or destruction of all mankind is not at all clear. When we turn to another Jewish tradition, however, we find the link between the story and what follows. We turn to The Mishnah as translated by H. Danby and there we read these words:

We find it said in the case of Cain who murdered his brother, The voice of thy brother's bloods crieth (Genesis 4.10). It is not said here blood in the singular, but bloods in the plural, that is, his own blood and the blood of his seed. Man was created single in order to show that to him who kills a single individual it shall be reckoned that he has slain the whole race, but to him who preserves the life of a single individual it is counted that he hath preserved the whole race. (Mishnah Sanhedrin, 4.5).

According to the Jewish rabbi who wrote these words the use of the plural bloods in the Bible implies not only the blood of one man but that of his whole progeny. We consider his interpretation to be highly speculative but, be that as it may, we are constrained to ask how it is that the alleged revelation of Allah in the Qur'an is a patent repetition of the rabbi's beliefs! We can only conclude that Muhammad plagiarized the dictum about the whole nation from a Jewish source without showing (or even knowing!) where the link originates.

By this comparison it is made clear what led Muhammad to this general digression: he had evidently received this rule from his informants when they related to him this particular event. (Geiger, Judaism and Islam, p. 81).

The extraordinary sequel between the story of the raven in both the Qur'an and Jewish folklore and the subsequent philosophy about the implications of the murder of one man together with his seed clearly suggests that Muhammad was depending on certain informants for his information and that these verses could not possibly have come from God. This conclusion can hardly be resisted:

The story of the world's first murderer affords a most informing example of the influence of a Jew behind the scenes. (Guillaume, "The Influence of Judaism on Islam", The legacy of Israel, p. 139).

Instead of trying to make capital out of the passages in the Bible which have parallels elsewhere in the Bible, Deedat should rather give us an alternative explanation as to why Qur'anic passages are embarrassingly similar to and patently reliant on Jewish books of fables and folklore.

He closes his chapter by describing those who believe that every word, comma and full stop of the Bible is God's Word as "Bible-thumpers" (Deedat, Is the Bible God's Word?, p. 33). Certainly we have no sympathy with fanatics who make such extreme claims for the Bible but, in the light of the evidence we have studied thus far, we can only retort that those equally fanatical Muslims who in the same manner vainly make similar extremist claims for the Qur'an against all the evidence to the contrary must be viewed with the same disdain and deserve to be ridiculed as Qur'an-thumpers!

8. ALLEGED CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE.

Deedat begins his seventh chapter "The Acid Test" with a claim that there is a contradiction between 2 Samuel 24.1, where we read that the Lord moved David to number Israel, and 1 Chronicles 21.1, which says it was Satan who provoked him to do so. Anyone who has a reasonable knowledge of both the Bible and the Qur'an will immediately perceive that Deedat is exposing nothing but his hopelessly inadequate understanding of a distinctive feature of the theology of both books. In the Qur'an itself we find a similar passage which sheds much light on this subject:

Seest thou not that we have set the devils on the disbelievers to confound them with confusion? Surah 19.83

Here we read that Allah sets devils on unbelievers. Therefore, whereas it is God who moves them to confusion, he uses the devils to provoke them towards it. In precisely the same way it was God who moved against David and used Satan to provoke him to number Israel. Likewise in the Book of Job in the Bible we read that Satan was given power over Job (Ayub in the Qur'an) to afflict him (Job 1.12) but that God later spoke as if it was he who was moved against him (Job 2.3). Whenever Satan provokes men the action can also indirectly be described as the movement of God for without his permission Satan could achieve nothing. This quote from Zamakshari's commentary on Surah 2.7 (Allah hath sealed their hearing and their hearts) should suffice as the final word on this matter:

It is now in reality Satan or the unbeliever who has sealed the heart. However, since it is God who has granted to him the ability and possibility to do it, the sealing is ascribed to him in the same sense as an act which he has caused. (Gatje, The Qur'an and its Exegesis, p. 223).

It appears that novices like Deedat should take a lesson in Qur'anic theology from renowned scholars like Zamakshari before exposing themselves to ridicule through unwarranted attacks on the Bible.

Deedat's further points about the three or seven years of plagues in 2 Samuel 24.13 and 1 Chronicles 21.11 and other similar discrepancies are all accounted for as minor copyist errors where scribes mistook one figure for another. For example in Hebrew one very small word is used for 2000 in 1 Kings 7.26 and it is remarkably similar to the figure for 3000 found in 2 Chronicles 4.5 (see Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 42). To any objective enquirer it is clear that a scribe in the latter case mistook 2000 for 3000. In all the cases set out by Deedat we have minor copyist errors easily identifiable as such and not contradictions in the normal sense of the word as he suggests. No one has ever shown us what effect these negligible errors have on the contents of the Bible as a whole.

We can just as easily allege that there is a palpable contradiction in the Qur'an where a day with God is described as a thousand years in our reckoning (Surah 32.5) whereas in an earlier Surah such a day is described as fifty thousand years (Surah 70.4). Instead of haranguing about the fact that 2 Chronicles 9.25 speaks of four thousand stalls while 1 Kings 4.26 speaks of forty thousand, which he describes as a staggering discrepancy (sic!) of 36000 (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 44), Deedat should rather explain an even more staggering discrepancy of 49000 whole years which have summarily disappeared from the reckoning of a day with God in the Qur'an.

9. PORNOGRAPHY IN THE BIBLE

In his next chapter Deedat makes much of the story of Judah's incest with Tamar (recorded in Genesis 38) and of similar stories in the Bible (such as Lot's incest with his daughters) and suggests that the Bible cannot be the Word of God because such stories are found in it.

We find this line of reasoning extremely hard to follow. Surely a book claiming to be the Word of God cannot be rejected as such because it shows up men - even the best of them - at their worst. All the stories Deedat refers to have to do with the wickedness of men and how the frank disclosure of the sins of men can affect the Bible's claim to be the Word of God is beyond comprehension. Throughout the Bible God is shown to be absolutely holy, perfectly righteous, and wonderfully loving. Very significantly Deedat nowhere suggests that the character of God in the Bible is worthy of reproach and surely this is all we really are concerned about when it comes to determining whether a book is the Word of God. If it unreservedly exposes the sins of men for what they are and refuses to cover up the excesses of even the best of them, it surely has a very fair claim to be God's Word - for it is concerned about his praise and not the praise of men. It is the glory of God that the Bible is concerned about - not the vainglory of men!

What is also significant is that Deedat conveniently overlooked a story in the Bible which reveals far greater wickedness than those he chooses to deal with. In 2 Samuel 11 we read that David saw Bathsheba bathing and had her brought in to him and he committed adultery with her. After this, when she conceived a child, David had her husband Uriah killed and took her as his own wife.

This story is at least the equal of all those referred to by Deedat in its wickedness but he carefully chooses to omit it. Why? Because the Qur'an also refers to it. We read in the 38th Surah that two men appeared before David and one who had ninety-nine ewes demanded the only ewe that the other had for himself. David retorted that he who had the ninety-nine had wronged the other in demanding his lone ewe. After this, however, we read that David realized that the parable was against himself and the Qur'an quotes Allah as saying of him:

David guessed that We had tried him and he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he bowed himself, and fell down prostrate and repented. So we forgave him that. Surah 38.25-26.

As with the story of Cain and Abel we have a vague sequence of events which have no apparent connection with what precedes. How did God try David and what had he done that he repented of for which he received God's forgiveness? We have to turn to the Bible to find the answer. In 2 Samuel 12 we read that the prophet Nathan came to David and told him of a rich man who had flocks of lambs but, when he needed one for a meal, took the one precious lamb of one of his servants instead. David was angry at the rich man but Nathan said to him:

You are the man. Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, and I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah, and if this were too little I would add to you as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have slain him with the sword of the Ammonites. 2 Samuel 12.7-9.

It is now clear how God had tried David. He had more than he could wish for and a host of wives but had taken the one wife of his servant for himself. When David responded 'I have sinned against the Lord', Nathan answered: 'The Lord has also put away your sin' (2 Samuel 12.13). The stories in the Qur'an and the Bible are so similar that they clearly refer to the same cause - David's adultery with Bathsheba. We need only say two things in the circumstances. Firstly, Deedat obviously chose to ignore this story of David's wickedness because he knew that it had a sequel in the Qur'an. Secondly, the fact that the Qur'an upholds the Biblical narrative shows that there can be no genuine objection to similar stories where the misdemeanours of other prophets are set out in the Christian Bible.

All the prophets were men of flesh and blood and were as likely to fall into gross wickedness as any lesser mortal might, and the Bible cannot fairly be criticized for sparing them no mercy in exposing their deeds. Even Muhammad was a man of passions similar to those of any other man and, although he had up to nine wives at one time, he could not restrain his desire to cohabit with whichever one he chose rather than share the company of each in turn. When Surah 33.51 was "revealed", which gave him divine sanction to defer and receive whomever he wished of his wives at his own whim and discretion, his favourite wife Ayesha was constrained to comment:

I feel that your Lord hastens in fulfilling your wishes and desires. (Sahih al-Bukhari, Vol.6, p. 295).

Jesus Christ was the only man who lived who was not subject to the whims, desires and failings of other men. Deedat asks, in the light of 2 Timothy 3. 16, under what headings we can classify the stories he mentions. I will kindly oblige with an answer:

1. Doctrine. All men are sinners, including even the prophets and the best of men. All need forgiveness which comes through the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
2. Reproof. Men cannot sin against God without incurring consequences. It is very interesting to see that immediately after the story of Judah's incest the only son of Jacob we hear of at any great length is Joseph - the one son whose conduct throughout the pages of Genesis remains blameless. He triumphed through his faithfulness while in time his less fortunate brothers had to bow the knee to him and beg him to give them their food for survival.
3. Correction. Although God may forgive us our sins he may yet make us suffer the consequences for our own good. David was forgiven of his adultery but he suffered four severe losses in his life as a result of his sin. Nevertheless this served to correct him for he never did anything remotely like this again.
4. Instruction into Righteousness. These events all show that man has no inherent righteousness but only the most awful potential, given the opportunity, to commit the worst of sins. We need to seek the righteousness of God instead which comes by faith in Jesus Christ. After repenting of the terrible crime he had committed, David prayed:
Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51. 10-12.

Sinners can obtain the righteousness of God by repenting of their sins, seeking God's forgiveness, and trusting to him for their salvation. As the Apostle Peter put it so well:

Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2.38

10. THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS CHRIST.

Deedat begins his last chapter with a suggestion that there is a contradiction between the genealogies of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke simply because there is a vast difference in the names listed by the two writers. To Deedat this distinction between these lists immediately proves that "both these authors are confounded liars" (Deedat, *Is the Bible God's Word?* p. 54). It taxes our credulity to believe that men who painstakingly recorded the most holy and truthful teaching ever given to mankind should turn out to be "confounded liars" as Deedat claims.

Fortunately we do not share Deedat's prejudice against the Bible and can afford to approach this question objectively. At the outset it is obviously true to say that every man has two genealogies - one through his father and one through his mother. Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus but he had to be regarded as his father for the sake of his genealogy as all Jews reckoned their genealogies through their fathers.

Therefore Matthew, without further ado, records the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph's line and, in his succeeding narrative about the birth of Jesus, concentrates on Joseph's role as his natural guardian and as the husband of Mary his mother.

Deedat casually mentions that, according to Luke 3.23, Joseph was the supposed father of Jesus (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 52) without further comment. Here, in this one word, lies the key to the genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. Throughout the list of ancestors he names we find no mention of a woman. Although he concentrates on Mary's role in the birth of Jesus, when he comes to her genealogy he does not describe Jesus as the son of Mary but as the supposed son of Joseph, meaning that, for the sake of sustaining a masculine genealogy, Joseph was being named in her place. Luke has very carefully included the word "supposed" in his genealogy so that there could be no confusion about it and so that his readers would know that it was not the actual genealogy of Joseph that was being recorded. This very simple explanation does away immediately with alleged contradictions or problems.

Even though the true facts have been explained for centuries, men blinded by prejudice continue to make this puerile charge for contradiction against the writers Matthew and Luke. (Finlay, *Face the Facts*, p. 102).

Deedat, while endeavouring to sustain his claim that there is a contradiction between the Gospel-writers, also accuses Matthew of giving Jesus an ignoble ancestry by naming certain "adulterers and offspring of incest" (*Is the Bible God's Word?*, p. 52) as his forefathers, as if this affected his total purity and holiness.

If we examine the Gospel of Matthew we will find four women named in the genealogy of Jesus. They are Tamar, who committed incest with Judah; Rahab, who was a prostitute and a Gentile; Ruth, who was a Gentile as well; and Bathsheba, who was an adulteress. Very significantly Matthew has named the four women in the ancestry of Jesus who had moral or ethnic defects. He has obviously done so deliberately and clearly did not think he was dishonouring Jesus by naming such women. If there was any stigma attached to such an ancestry he would surely have named some of the more holy women he was descended from, like Sarah and Rebecca. Why did he choose to specifically name the very four women who disturbed the "purity" of his ancestry? Matthew very quickly gives us his own answer. When the angel came to Joseph he said of the child to be born:

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 2.21

It was precisely for people such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba that Jesus came into the world. He came to save such people from their sins and to make his salvation available to all men, both Jew and Gentile alike. As he himself said to the Jews and to his disciples on one occasion:

Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice'. For I came not to call the righteous but sinners. Matthew 9. 12-13.

If you, the reader, imagine that the religious efforts you have made over the years count for some sort of righteousness before God and that your sins will be glossed over by a God who cares little for the manner in which they confront his holiness, then pursue your futile quest for self-righteousness. You need not look to Jesus for he cannot help you. There is no one who can help you.

But if you know that your sins are many and if you have discovered your true self, and have found that there is no righteousness in you but only gross wickedness; if you have been so honest with yourself as to admit these facts, then turn to Jesus for he came to save men like you and he is able to cleanse you and deliver you from all your sins.

We do not propose to deal at any length with Deedat's queries about the authors of the books of the Bible. Jesus confirmed that all the books of the Old Testament as received by the Jews were the inspired and authoritative Word of God, constantly quoting from them and declaring that the Scriptures, as received by them, could not be broken (John 10. 35), and the Holy Spirit has uniformly testified through all quarters of the Christian Church to the equal authority of the books of the New Testament.

The Qur'an too, as we have seen, likewise gives full support to the scriptures of the Jews and the Christians at the time of Muhammad as being the genuine Taurat and Injil, the very Word of God. Those books were the Old and New Testaments as we know them. No one can sincerely doubt these facts.

11. CONCLUSION.

We can only draw one conclusion from all that has been said. Deedat has failed to discredit the Bible as the Word of God. Like Joommal before him, he has only exposed himself as an unworthy critic of the Christian scriptures.

Furthermore it is sad to see the negative spirit and attitude that pervades every page of his booklet. Nowhere is there any effort to treat the contents of the Bible objectively. Not once is a good word said for it and it amazes us that any one could read through the Bible and write a treatise on it that is purely critical. From first page to last the reader is confronted with a spirit of excessive prejudice, one truly unworthy of a self-acclaimed "scholar of the Bible".

On page 41 of his booklet he urges his readers to obtain a free Bible from our fellowship. I decided one day to visit one of the many Muslims who had, in consequence, written to us for a Bible and found that this young man had followed Deedat's advice on the same page to mark all the alleged contradictions and pornographic passages in coloured ink. He wasted no time in finding the texts he was looking for, which Deedat had vainly promised him would "confute and confuse any missionary or Bible scholar" (Is the Bible God's Word?, p. 41) who happened to come his way. Apart from these texts the young man, however, had made no effort to read the Bible or find out what it actually taught.

We had hoped that the spirit of the Crusades was buried by now but it appears that certain Muslim authors are determined to revive it in the hearts of the Muslim youth of today. Surely any sincere Muslim will agree that such an approach to the Bible is thoroughly questionable. What profit can be gained by perusing a book with no other purpose than to find fault with it? What sort of mentality is this that motivates men to seek nothing but supposed errors in a book before they have even read a word of it? Well did a Christian author say of the Bible:

It is thus a wondrous Word that God has given to man. Its depth and beauty will largely be missed by those who read with only an eye to criticize. (Young, Thy Word is Truth, p. 138).

I have often been heartened to receive letters from Muslims requesting Bibles which show a very deep measure of respect for it and have also been encouraged to discover that there are other Muslim authors in the world who take a different approach to our Holy Book. The Islamic Foundation, a wellknown Muslim organisation which has published many books on Islam, has adopted a far more mature and respectable attitude to the Bible. It encourages all Muslims to do likewise and has this to say of the Christian faith in one of its publications:

The importance of need for a Muslim to study Christianity requires no emphasis ... While Islam is being studied by many Christian students, few Muslims have taken the study of Christianity as a serious task ... The situation in which Muslims find themselves today demands that they study Christianity ... Certainly the best approach to study Christianity is to consult its own source materials and analyze the thoughts and presentations of its adherents, instead of indulging in cheap polemics as regrettably some Muslim writers have done in the past. (Ahmad Von Denffer, General and Introductory Books on Christianity, p. 4).

What sound words of wisdom these are! Unfortunately, as we have seen, it is not only some Muslim writers of the past who have indulged in cheap harangue against the Bible. It is still going on today through the likes of Deedat and Joommal. We can only endorse the sentiments in the quotation we have given and must say to our Muslim readers that they will obtain nothing but a thoroughly distorted view of Christianity from booklets such as the one we have refuted in this publication.

As the wiser Muslim has said, the best way for Muslims to gain a true understanding of the Christian faith is to obtain books written by Christians who truly believe in it. This quote is well worthy of the consideration of all sincere Muslims:

There is no reason why those established in their faith should not read the Bible. This line may be taken with those who aver their strong faith in Islam. Possession of the Qur'an need not debar the Moslem from making acquaintance with scriptures of such unique historical, moral and instructive importance for all men as the Bible. Many Moslems having at first, through ignorance, rejected the Bible, later on learning its true contents have reckoned it their priceless treasure. (Harris, How to Lead Moslems to Christ, p. 17).

We shall willingly supply a free Bible to any Muslim who will read it openly with a genuine desire to discover what it really teaches, who will not deface it in any way as Deedat recommends by colouring in its texts (Is the Bible God's Word?, p. 41), and who will show it the same respect that he would like Christians to show to the Qur'an. Those who share Deedat's prejudices, however, should not bother to open a Bible until they have changed their attitude towards it. They are like those of whom the Qur'an speaks when it says their likeness is as the likeness of the ass carrying books (Surah 62.5). As the donkey is unaware of the value of the load on its back, so such men are ignorant of the spiritual treasure they have taken into their unwashed hands.

May God Almighty, in his great mercy and love, grant that we may all come to the knowledge of his holy truth - and that we may be willing to seek it wherever it may be found. May all Muslims who have the immense privilege of possessing a Bible discover its glorious truths and radiant beauty by reading it openly with a sincere desire to know and understand its teachings and guidance.

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CHRIST IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

A comparative study of the Christian and Muslim attitudes to the person of Jesus Christ

by John Gilchrist

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CHRIST IN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

During 1983 Ahmed Deedat published a booklet entitled *Christ in Islam*. Although the title presupposes that the author's intent was to produce a general survey of the Islamic concept of Jesus, it is not surprising to find that much of the booklet is a polemic against Christianity. Like most of his publications, Deedat's new booklet appears to be primarily an argument against the Christian faith. We deem it appropriate, in the circumstances, to analyse the issues raised in the booklet and to offer a solid refutation of his arguments. It is not our aim to consider the booklet generally but rather to deal solely with those issues that relate directly to Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ.

We do not hesitate, from the outset, to say that insofar as Deedat has endeavoured to discredit the Biblical accounts of Jesus' life and personality he has failed dismally. A good example appears as early as page 6 of his booklet where he claims that the original name of Jesus was "Isa" (as it is the name given to him in the Qur'an) and that it derives from the Hebrew "Esau". He suggests that Esau is a "very common Jewish name" and that it is "used more than sixty times" in the first book of the Bible, namely Genesis (*Christ in Islam*, p.6). Deedat's overall ignorance of the Bible and Jewish history thus appears early in his booklet, for there is only one Esau mentioned in Genesis and he is the brother of Jacob, the true father of the Israelite nation. On every one of those more than sixty occasions it is this Esau alone who is spoken of, and there is no mention anywhere in the Bible of any descendant of Israel being called Esau. The Jews just simply did not call their children by this name.

Jacob and Esau were enemies for most of their lives and their descendants, the Israelites and the Edomites, were often at war with each other. No Jewish children were ever named after the brother of Jacob, the father of the

Israelites, for he stood against Jacob and was rejected by God (Hebrews 12:17). It is thus a fallacy to suggest that the original name of Jesus was Esau.

An obvious historical blunder thus appears very early in Deedat's booklet, though the error is not entirely his own. Christian Arabs have always called Jesus *Yasu* after the Aramaic *Yashua* from which comes the Greek "Iesous" and the English Jesus. For reasons that have never been apparent Muhammad chose to call him *Isa*. Deedat's interpretation of this name as "Esau" tends to lend support to the suggestion made by some that the Jews in Arabic cunningly misled Muhammad by subtly perverting the true name of Jesus into the name of their forefather's irreligious brother. If Deedat's conclusion is correct, it militates heavily against the supposed divine origin of the Qur'an.

There can be no doubt, however, that Esau is no nearer to the original and true name of Jesus than Muhammad's *Isa*. This fundamental error sets the tone for the whole of Deedat's treatment of the contrast between Christ in Islam and Christianity and it is hard to resist the conclusion that the Jesus of the Bible, rather than the Isa of the Qur'an, is the true Jesus. We shall proceed to analyse other subjects in Deedat's treatise which relate the Isa of the Qur'an to the true Jesus of Christianity.

1. MARY IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

Deedat has much to say, not only about the Qur'anic teaching about Jesus, but also its teaching about his mother Mary. Under the heading "Mary's birth" he says:

The story is that the maternal grandmother of Jesus, Hannah, had hitherto been barren. She poured out her heart to God: if only God will grant her a child, she would surely dedicate such a child for the service of God in the temple. (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.9)

Every Christian child who has attended Sunday school knows about the story of Hannah and how she prayed earnestly to God for a son and promised to deliver him to the service of the Lord all his days if her prayer was answered. The only problem is that the child that was born to her was Samuel who became a prophet and anointed David to be king over Israel about a thousand years before the time of Mary and Jesus! Her prayer is recorded in 1 Samuel 1:11 and later in the same chapter we read:

In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." (*1 Samuel 1:20*)

How, then, did Mr. Deedat, a supposed "Muslim scholar of the Bible" as he describes himself, come to make such a blunder as to confuse the mother of Samuel with the mother of Mary? The reason is that the Qur'an itself confuses the two women and, although it does not name Hannah, nevertheless records the anachronism which confounds the two women (Sura Al Imran 3:35-36). (Some of the works of Hadith openly say that the name of Mary's mother was indeed Hannah and both ancient and modern commentators of the Qur'an accept that this was her real name.)

On the next page of his booklet Deedat says, "This was the story. But where did Muhammad (pbuh) get this knowledge from? He was an *Ummi* (unlettered). He did not know how to read or write" (*Christ in Islam*, p.10). As an obvious mistake has been made this is a very good question indeed! Deedat refers to the fact that Muhammad was unlettered as a back-up to the claim that the Qur'an is the Word of God. But, as he has clearly mixed up the two women, surely it is obvious that the fact that Muhammad was unlettered is all the more proof that he was the real composer of the book. If he had been well-read in the Jewish Scriptures he would never have made such mistakes.

In fact the whole story of Mary's birth and dedication in the Qur'an is a strange confusion of various passages of the Bible. Mary herself is clearly confused with Elijah, for a start, for he was the prophet confined to solitude who was fed by ravens that brought him food from above (1 Kings 17:6 - the Qur'an states that Mary, too, was fed from heaven in Sura Al Imran 3:37). Nevertheless it is the name given to Mary's mother, namely Hannah, that really gives us the clue as to where the composers of this story obtained their material. We should perhaps at this stage mention that the original story is first found in an apocryphal work entitled "Proto-evangelium of

James the Less" and that it was simply taken over by Muhammad into the Qur'an without him being aware of its mystical origin.

The story arises from a confusion between the record of Hannah's prayer for a son and this passage in the Gospel of Luke:

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. *Luke 2:36-38*

One can clearly see how the anachronism came about. Once again we have a woman whose original Hebrew name was Hannah and yet we find that it is this woman who remained in the Temple night and day, significantly worshipping and *fasting* for a good many years. Mary has clearly been confused, not only with Elijah and Samuel, but with Anna the prophetess as well! It is clear that the two respective Hannahs - the mother of Samuel and the daughter of Phanuel - have been confused with one another and the story in Sura Al Imran 3 in the Qur'an is therefore clearly a peculiar blending of the two totally different stories in the Bible about these two women.

Clearly, therefore, Deedat has committed a major blunder by mixing up the mother of Mary with a woman who lived ten centuries before her. But as if this were not enough he quotes another verse from the Qur'an in his booklet that confuses Mary herself with another woman who lived nearly *twenty* centuries before her. On page 15 of his *Christ in Islam* he quotes these words which are addressed to Mary by her neighbours:

Yaa ukhta Haaruuna - "O Sister of Aaron". Sura Maryam 19:28

On the next page he quotes Ali's commentary on this title, "Sister of Aaron", where the translator says, "Mary is reminded of her high lineage and the unexceptionable morals of her father and mother." The problem here is that the only *Harun* mentioned in the Qur'an (Aaron in English) is the Levitical priest who was the brother of Moses and who lived nearly two thousand years before Jesus! Moses is expressly quoted as speaking of *Haaruuna akhi* - "Aaron my brother" - in the Qur'an (Sura Ta Ha 20:30). How therefore could Mary, the mother of Jesus, be the sister of Aaron and Moses as well

In this case Muhammad's error cannot be attributed to an apocryphal writing as in the case of Hannah and Samuel. This time the confusion is entirely his own. During his own lifetime he was confronted by Christians with this anachronism and his answer was that the people of old used to give names to their compatriots after the names of apostles and pious persons who had gone before them (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.3, p.1169). It is extremely hard to credit this line of reasoning, however, as there is no other instance in the Qur'an where anyone else is so called. Indeed it is also most unlikely that Aaron would be called the brother (*akha*) of Moses in the Qur'an, as often as he is, in the direct sense if Mary was only called his sister (*ukhta*) in a figurative sense. Elsewhere in the Qur'an the word *ukhtun* (a sister) is always applied to an immediate sister (as in Sura al-Nisa 4:12,23,176) and the use of the word in Mary's case can only mean a "blood-sister of Aaron". It cannot sincerely be explained away as meaning one simply named after her ancestor Aaron as Muhammad is said to have suggested.

Even if it was intended to carry this meaning we would still be faced with extreme difficulties, for it leads to untenable suppositions. In those days people were only named as sons or daughters (never brothers or sisters, incidentally) of people from whom they directly descended (e.g. Matthew 1:1 where Jesus is called the "the son of David, the son of Abraham", and Luke 1:5 where Elizabeth is called one of the "daughters of Aaron"). The problem is that Mary was never descended from Aaron at all! Aaron was a Levitical priest, descended with his brother Moses from Levi, one of the sons of Jacob. On the other hand Mary was descended from Judah, one of Jacob's other sons, through the line of David (Luke 1:32). She was not even of the same tribe as Aaron. The only relationship between them was purely national and ethnic, the remotest there could be. It is true Elizabeth is called her "kinswoman" in Luke 1:36, but if there had been any intermarrying between their ancestors in any way, it must have been on Elizabeth's side. One of her ancestors must have married into the tribe of Judah (which is hardly surprising as, after the exiles to Assyria and Babylon, this tribe constituted the overwhelming

remnant of Israel that finally returned to the promised land). On the other hand it is expressly stated in the Bible that Jesus is an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek, and he, therefore, could not have been descended in any way from Levi through Aaron. Accordingly his mother Mary could likewise not have had any Levitical blood in her and so was in no way descended from or related to Aaron:

Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek *rather than* one named after the order of Aaron? For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well. For the one of whom these things are spoken belonged to *another tribe*, from which no one has ever served at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended *from Judah*, and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests. This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become a priest, *not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent*, but by the power of an indestructible life. *Hebrews 7:11-16* (my italics)

It is therefore only too obvious that Mary had no connection with Aaron at all and the title given to her in the Qur'an does indeed appear to be entirely inappropriate. How then did this error arise? We have to turn to the Bible and here we read:

Then Miriam, the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand. *Exodus 15:20*

The woman spoken of here was the real sister of Aaron, who lived centuries before the mother of Jesus, and the confusion has arisen because the names of the two women are the same in Hebrew, namely *Miriam* (as they are in Arabic, viz. *Maryam*).

We have seen that *ukhta Harun* in the Qur'an must mean the blood-sister of Aaron and this is precisely what Miriam was. Muhammad clearly confused *Maryam*, the mother of Jesus, with this woman. Furthermore the evidence is strongly substantiated by the name given to Mary's father in the Qur'an. In the Bible we read that Jochebed "bore to Amram, Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister" (Numbers 26:59). So the father of Aaron and Miriam was a man named Amram - and yet this is the very name given to the father of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in the Qur'an! He is called *Imran*, the Arabic form of Amram (as *Ibrahim* is the Arabic form of Abraham). Mary, accordingly, is expressly called *Maryamabnata Imran* - "Mary, daughter of Imran" - in the Qur'an (Sura al-Tahrim 66:12). So she is not only called the sister of Aaron but also the daughter of Imran. We therefore have a double-proof of the fact that she has been confused with Miriam, the true sister of Aaron and daughter of Amram.

Furthermore it may well be asked *why* Mary is called the "sister of Aaron" in the Qur'an if she is not confused with Miriam. We have shown that she was in no way descended from him and no more closely related to him than to any other patriarch or figurehead of Israel. Accordingly, what relevance is there in the appellation? Why was she called after Aaron rather than Moses, Elijah, Solomon, Joseph or some other prophet? Not only can we find no relevance in the title, the passage quoted above from the Book of Hebrews also makes it plain that it is, on the contrary, all-conceived and quite inappropriate.

Not only, therefore, does the Qur'an confuse the two Hannahs but also the Marys as well. Deedat is at pains in his booklet to try to show that the Qur'anic account of Mary's life is superior to that of the Bible, but when it patently contains such anachronisms as those we have considered, surely it is obvious that the Biblical account is the true one.

Three more points made by Deedat about Mary should be treated briefly in conclusion. On one page he quotes Sura Al Imran 3:42 where angels are quoted as saying to Mary that God had "chosen thee above the women of all nations" and comments:

Such an honour is not to be found given to Mary even in the Christian Bible! (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.8)

This charge is completely unfounded for the Bible makes exactly the same point as that made in the verse quoted from the Qur'an when it quotes Elizabeth as saying to Mary:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb." Luke 1:42

In fact it is in this verse that we find out why Mary was preferred above all women of all nations. The statement that she was chosen as such, in both the Qur'an and the Bible, appears solely in the context of the promise that she was to bear a son, the holy child Jesus, the Messiah so long awaited (Sura Al Imran 3:45; Luke 1:31-33). "Blessed is the fruit of your womb," Elizabeth so rightly said. Mary was only the greatest among women, chosen above the women of all nations, because *she gave birth to the greatest among men, chosen above the men of all nations as the Saviour of the world, even Jesus Christ.*

The second point made by Deedat worth considering is that there is a whole chapter in the Qur'an, *Sura Maryam* (Sura 19), "named in honour of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ (pbuh)" (*Christ in Islam*, p.11). He would have done even better to disclose that Mary is the *only woman expressly mentioned by name* in the Qur'an, and that on many occasions. No other woman is so named. Muhammad did well to give such prominence to her, but surely it is clear that Mary was only worthy of such honour because she was the mother of the most prominent man who ever lived, namely Jesus Christ.

Lastly Deedat, always seeking occasion to find fault with the Bible, criticises the title "woman" used by Jesus when addressing his mother in John 2:4, alleging that Jesus "behaved insolently towards his mother" (*Christ in Islam*, p.19). He suggests that it would have been more appropriate to have simply called her "mother".

Once again Deedat exposes his ignorance of the Bible and the times in which it was written, for the title "woman" was an *endearing title of respect* and was so used by Jesus whenever he addressed women. In one passage we read that the Jewish leaders sought to stone a woman caught in adultery and asked Jesus for his verdict in the matter. He replied: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (*John 8:7*). When they had all walked away he gently said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" (*John 8:10*). When she said, "No one, Lord", he said "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (*John 8:11*). While compassionately extending to her the hand of mercy he called her "woman". Was this "insolent behaviour"? The title was purely one of honour and respect, like "Madame" in French or "Dame" in Afrikaans.

Jesus also used the title when comforting the woman of Samaria (John 4:21) and once again addressed his mother in this way as he was dying on the cross, and saw her and his beloved disciple John standing next to her. He said to her:

"Woman, behold your son." John 19:26

He then said to John, "behold your mother" and from that hour "the disciple took her into his own home" (*John 19:27*). Even though he was enduring all the horrors of the cross, he did not forget his mother and tenderly committed her to his closest disciple among the men who followed him. After his resurrection he again used the title "woman" when speaking to Mary Magdalene, his closest disciple among the women who followed him (*John 20:15*). No one sincerely reading these narratives can possibly draw the conclusion that the title "woman" was anything but a gentle title of respect.

In conclusion we can only say that Deedat has made a sorry mess of his treatment of Mary's life and the titles given to her in the Qur'an and the Bible. There can be little doubt that the Biblical record of Mary's honour, lineage and life is the true one.

2. THE EXCLUSIVE TITLE GIVEN TO JESUS

Not only does Deedat show in his statements about the mother of Jesus that he has very little real knowledge of the Bible but this ignorance is once again apparent in his brief consideration of the title given to Jesus in the Bible, namely the Christ. He points out that the original Hebrew word *masaha* (from which comes *mashiah*, i.e. the Messiah, or the Christ) was a general word denoting any kind of anointing and that it was used of priests, pillars, tabernacles, etc., which were set apart for worship and duly consecrated for this purpose.

His argument then runs that, whereas Jesus is called the Messiah in the Bible or, as it is in the Greek, *Christos*, this does not make him unique in any way as "every prophet of God is so anointed or appointed" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13).

He goes on to state that in Islam certain titles are given to certain prophets which, in a general sense, apply to all prophets. He says that whereas Muhammad is called *rasulullah* (messenger of Allah) and Moses *kalimullah* (word of Allah), these titles apply to all prophets, for each was a messenger of God with whom God spoke regularly. His conclusion, therefore, is that the title *Christos* is in no way unique and that Jesus was accordingly no different to the other messengers of God.

Once again his ignorance is exposed, for the title given to Jesus in the Bible is actually (in the original Greek) *ho Christos*, that is, "the Christ". The use of the definite article renders the title exclusive in a very real sense and reveals that Jesus was indeed *the* Messiah, God's Anointed One, in a way that none of the other prophets were. Indeed the same construction appears in the Qur'an where Jesus is called *al-Masih*, that is, the only one to whom this title applies.

Indeed in the Qur'an Jesus is also called a *rasul* on at least ten occasions (see, for example, Sura al-Nisa 4:171 where he is expressly called a *rasulullah*) and in Sura Al Imran 3:45 is called a *kalimatim-minhu*, that is, a "Word from Him". But the title *al-Masih*, the Messiah, is applied to Jesus alone in the Qur'an and in the Bible the same title *ho Christos* likewise can be applied to no one else. Jesus was in a very unique way the Messiah and the title is his alone.

Deedat, of course, aims at reducing Jesus to the level of ordinary prophethood and thus finds this exclusive title the Messiah, (or the Christ), very awkward and a cause of offence. His argument, however, is based entirely on the false presumption that the title was never applied to Jesus in a very unique sense.

The Qur'an, while fittingly calling Jesus *al-Masih*, makes no attempt to explain the title. What, then, was its true meaning? One needs no Christian efforts here to transmute "base metals into shining gold" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13), as Deedat wishfully imagines, to exalt the status of Messiah above that of ordinary prophethood. For it was the *Jews* who spoke of a coming climactic figure whom they named the Messiah after an express use of this title in their Scriptures to so describe him (Daniel 9:26). Throughout the Scriptures of the earlier prophets they rightly found constant predictions of the coming of God's Anointed, one who would not be an ordinary prophet but the ultimate Saviour of the whole world. (Examples are Isaiah 7:14;9:6-7;42:1-4; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Micah 5:2-4; and Zechariah 6:12-13). He would establish the kingdom of God forever in justice and righteousness and would rule over the nations. He would at first be humbled (Isaiah 53:1-12) and cut off from the land of the living (Daniel 9:26), but at his return at the end of time he would bring the salvation and judgement of God, ruling in justice and glory over his righteous subjects while bringing his enemies from all over the world into submission at his feet (Psalm 110:1).

The Jews knew that this exalted figure, the Messiah, was coming and when Jesus came they openly speculated whether it might be him (John 7:31,41-43;10:24; Matthew 26:63). On a number of occasions he openly confirmed that he was indeed the Messiah (John 4:26; Matthew 16:17; Mark 14:62) and told the Jews that he would return in a cloud with power and great glory and that they would see him seated at the right hand of God (Matthew 26:64). It requires no supposed Christian "juggling of words" (*Christ in Islam*, p.13) to exalt Jesus to the status of God's eternal Saviour and Messiah. The Jews themselves knew that the Messiah would not be made of "base metals" like the other prophets but would, in comparison, indeed be "shining gold" which Jesus surely was!

The Jews tragically rejected their Messiah, the fulfilment of their hopes, and so were cut off very shortly afterwards (AD 70), and to this day their religion has lost all its original meaning and glory. A more ironical tragedy is the attitude of the Muslim world, which in one breath acknowledges that Jesus was indeed the Messiah but in another claims that he was only a prophet. The whole meaning of the title is missed completely in Islam.

Jesus Christ is the exclusive Saviour of the world, the unique Messiah whom God sent for the healing of the nations. The title is his alone and exalts him to the status he alone enjoys among the sons of men - the King of Glory who will rule throughout eternity.

3. A CONSIDERATION OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Deedat's prejudices against the Christian Bible find further expression in his treatment of the conception and birth of Jesus. He quotes Luke 1:35 which records the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary to the effect that the Holy Spirit would "come upon" her and that the power of the Most High would "overshadow" her. He comments on these words:

The language used here is distasteful - gutter language - you agree!? (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.24)

In his booklet the words "gutter language" are emphasised in bold print. Someone has said, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." It seems the converse is equally true. Deedat implies that there is something immoral about the Biblical account of the conception of Jesus. He very significantly omits the rest of the verse: "therefore the child to be born of you will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). The whole verse is set in an awesome context of holiness. Because this child was to be conceived, not by the medium of impure flesh, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, *therefore* the child would not be impure and sinful like all other men, but would be *holy*, even the Son of God. How anyone can see anything distasteful in this is beyond understanding. The Qur'an itself teaches that the reason for the conception of Jesus by divine power alone was his unique holiness (Sura Maryam 19:19). These words apply:

To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving, nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. Titus 1:15

In Luke's Gospel one often reads of their Holy Spirit coming upon people and in every case the expression implies an anointing of his holy influence. Simeon was a man "righteous and devout" and the "Holy Spirit was upon him" (Luke 2:25) and when Jesus was baptised and was praying, the "Holy Spirit descended upon him" (Luke 3:22). Likewise we read that when the glory of God appeared above Jesus when he was transfigured, "a cloud came and overshadowed them" (Luke 9:34). How can anyone say, when similar expressions are used of the conception of Jesus (i.e. that the Holy Spirit "came upon" Mary and that the power of God "overshadowed" her), that this is "distasteful - gutter language"?

It is quite clear that the words used to describe the manner in which the Christ-child would be conceived are generally used in the Bible to describe any occasion where a very real anointing of the power and holiness of God might come upon a person. We really cannot see what the basis of Deedat's argument is and are once again led to the impression that he must be prejudiced against the Christian faith to make such unwarranted charges against it. His efforts to compare the Biblical version of the birth of Jesus unfavourably with the Qur'anic version of the same event prove to be equally futile when he says:

For God to create a Jesus, without a human father, He merely has to will it. If he wants to create a million Jesus' without fathers or mothers, He merely has to will them into existence. (Deedat, *Christ in Islam*, p.24)

This begs the obvious question - why did God not create a "million Jesus' without fathers or mothers"? Surely the fact that only *one* man was conceived in this way shows that it was *not* the will of God that many should thus be conceived without fathers. On the contrary, it was clearly his express will that only one unique personality was destined to be born in this way. This also demands the probability that there was something very unique about the man Jesus for him to be conceived in this way. All ordinary men have natural fathers and mothers - prophets included. There can be only one reason why Jesus had no human father. Being the Son of the eternal Father it was absolutely essential that he be conceived in human form in an unusual way, without human intervention and by the power of the Spirit of God alone. This is surely quite obvious.

It also does not help Deedat to quote from Yusuf Ali's translation and commentary on the Qur'an in respect of Sura Al Imran 3:59 where the commentator points to the fact that Adam had neither father nor mother and so has a greater right (as Deedat suggests on page 26 of his booklet) to be called the Son of God. Adam was *created* in

a full adult state when it was not possible he be born of human parents. Someone had be created first. But Jesus was *born* of a woman alone when God's natural order of procreation had been in effect for centuries. It is obvious why Adam had no father or mother. But what was the reason why God should interrupt the natural order of procreation so that Jesus could be born of a mother only? There is no reasonable alternative to the following explanation given in the Bible which thoroughly *contrasts* Jesus and Adam:

The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:47

Adam was just an ordinary, natural man into whom God breathed the breath of life. Jesus, however, was an eternal personality, a life-giving spirit, who came from heaven and whose conception, therefore, had to involve an interruption of the natural, earthly course of the human race. He *was* the breath of life and those who believe in him receive eternal life and shall be transformed into his heavenly likeness in the course of time.

4. MELCHIZEDEK - A TYPE OF THE CHRIST TO COME

We proceed to consider Deedat's manner of dealing with the resemblance between Jesus and his forerunner, Melchizedek. He says of the latter that he is "another person greater than Jesus" (*Christ in Islam*, p.26) and quotes Hebrews 7:3, which says that Melchizedek was without father, mother or descent, and had neither beginning of days nor end of life. After this description three innocuous-looking dots follow in Deedat's booklet (p.26). This is not unusual - the phenomenon occurs in other booklets Deedat has written (see No.1 in this series, *The Crucifixion of Christ: A Fact, not Fiction*) and in pamphlets published by his Islamic Propagation Centre. These three dots invariably stand for certain words that have been discreetly omitted from the text by Deedat *because they refute the very point he is trying to make*. A remarkable phenomenon indeed! We shall quote the whole passage from Hebrew, placing in italics the words of the text casually suppressed by Deedat and replaced by three little dots:

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, *but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever*. Hebrews 7:1-3

The closing words in italics openly refute the point Deedat is labouring to make, that is, that Melchizedek was "greater than Jesus" for they show plainly that he only *resembles* the Son of God. He was thus only a forerunner, a type, a shadow and limited example of the eternal High Priest to come.

The point made in the passage quoted Hebrews is that *the Scriptures* do not contain a genealogy of Melchizedek, not that he actually had no genealogy. They simply do not mention his father, mother or genealogy, nor do they tell us when he was born or when he died. He appears in a brief passage in Genesis 14 where he is described as the king of Salem who met Abraham returning from a slaughter of the people who captured his nephew Lot. He is openly described as a "priest of God Most High" (Genesis 14:18) but apart from these notes, no other mention is made of him.

The argument set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews is that Jesus was not a Levitical priest after the order of Aaron but an eternal high priest after the order of Melchizedek. This means that as the latter's beginning and end are not specifically mentioned in the Bible, so in this respect he prefigures Jesus who was actually from heaven, an eternal being who really has no beginning or end in an absolute sense. Melchizedek only *resembled* him - the point Deedat subtly obscures - and the brief description of his character as a priest of God to whom Abraham paid tithes serves as an example of the ultimate, true minister of God to come, Jesus Christ.

5. JESUS - THE ETERNAL SON OF THE LIVING GOD

The latter part of Deedat's booklet contains a relentless and at times uncouth attack on the Christian doctrine and Biblical teaching that Jesus is the Son of God. Nevertheless he is obliged to concede that from at least one point of view, "he is pre-eminently the Son of God" (*Christ in Islam*, p.29). On page 28 he quotes a number of texts to show that the expression "son of God" is found often in the Bible in contexts where people are being described

generally as children of God. He then concludes that when Jesus claimed to be the Son of God he was also only speaking in a metaphorical sense and that Christians err when they say that he was the eternal Son of God.

No one can possibly draw such a conclusion without overlooking a wealth of evidence in the Bible that shows that Jesus was the Son of God in a unique and absolute sense. On numerous occasions he made statements that make this point very clearly. Consider this verse:

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Luke 10:22

As the Jews once testified, "so man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46). No other prophet used such language to identify himself. All things, said Jesus, had been delivered to him and no one could know the Father unless the Son actually revealed him. Here is a similar quotation which shows that Jesus considered himself *the* Son of God in an absolute sense, a quote which, like many others, is expediently ignored in Deedat's booklet:

"The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him." John 5:22-23

If we are all children of God, as Deedat imagines (p.29), why did Jesus say that all men should honour *him* as the Son of God even as they honour the Father? Indeed throughout the Gospels we find teachings that show that Jesus regarded himself as the unique, eternal Son of God. On one occasion he told a parable about a householder who planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants. When the season for fruit came the owner sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit, but one by one they maltreated them and sent them away empty-handed, beating one and wounding another. The owner of the vineyard then said to himself:

"What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; it may be they will respect him." Luke 20:13

But when the tenants saw him, they promptly rejected him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Jesus then concluded that the owner would destroy those tenants and let the vineyard out to others. Immediately the Jews "perceived that he had told this parable against them" (Luke 20:19). The perception was well-founded and the interpretation of the parable is obvious. God had allowed the Jews to live in a land he had given them as an inheritance, yet they constantly rebelled against him. He sent his servants the prophets but these too they rejected and often maltreated. Eventually after they had cast Jesus out of their midst and killed him, God brought destruction upon them and they were uprooted from the land of Palestine while Jerusalem became a heap of ruins (this was forty years after Jesus had ascended to heaven and occurred under the onslaught of the Roman tribune Titus).

The vital point in the parable is the identification of the last messenger to the tenants as the *beloved son* of the owner, as distinct from the former messengers who were only servants. Jesus clearly distinguished himself from the former prophets in this parable, showing that whereas they were only God's servants, he was his beloved Son. This was confirmed on at least two occasions when God himself spoke from heaven and said of Jesus:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Matthew 3:17

On another occasion Jesus asked his disciples who the people thought he was. They answered that it was generally believed that he was one of the prophets. So he asked them who they thought he was and Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16) to which Jesus answered that he was especially blessed for he had not perceived this through human wisdom but through a revelation from above. It is not possible to honestly conclude, from a genuine study of his teaching, that Jesus ever regarded himself as anything less than the eternal, unique Son of God. These words sum up his teaching:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him may not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

God sent his only Son, a teaching found constantly in the Bible. (For a treatment of the use of the word "begotten" in the King James Version and Deedat's arguments about it, see Nr.3 in this series, *The Textual History of the Qur'an and the Bible*).

Those who are God's children on earth, his sons and daughters in a lesser sense, are so because God has become their Father and has chosen to treat them as his children. But Jesus was his eternal Son, who came from him into the world so that others might become children of God. The whole distinction between Jesus as the absolute, eternal Son of God, and Christians who have become the sons of God is put exceptionally well in these words:

But when the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might attain adoption as sons. Galatians 4:4

God sent forth his Son so that many others might attain *adoption as sons*. Jesus taught this quite plainly as well, saying "I proceeded and came forth from God" (John 8:42). Yet another verse makes this abundantly clear:

For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17

Jesus was the *only Son from the Father* (John 1:18) and he regarded himself as such in all his teaching. He never claimed to be the son of God in the sense that all true believers are children of God. Speaking of the day of his return he said that no one knows the day, "not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Here there is a clear progression of authority, viz. men - angels - the Son - the Father. Quite clearly Jesus spoke of himself in only one ultimate context - above the angels as the only Son of the eternal Father. He describes his status in terms that relate to the Divine Being alone.

Deedat goes on to deal with the statement of Jesus, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), saying that its context shows that this does not mean that Jesus was one with his Father in omniscience, nature or omnipotence, but only "one in purpose" (*Christ in Islam*, p.37). To set the quotation in its context he quotes verses 27-29 before it and says:

How can anyone be so blind as not to see the exactness of the ending of the last two verses. But spiritual blinkers are more impervious than physical defects. (*Christ in Islam*, p.37)

One wonders where the blindness really is and who it is whose spiritual eyes are restricted by blinkers, for Deedat casually glosses over a remarkable statement made by Jesus in one of the very verses he is referring to, where Jesus says of those who are his true followers:

"I give unto them eternal life." John 10:28

Who but God alone can give not only life but *eternal life*? One has to read such statements, not only in their immediate context, but in the whole context of Jesus' overall teaching about himself. At another time he said:

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son gives life to whom he will." John 5:21

This statement shows that the Son indeed possesses the same omnipotence as the Father. At the end of his earthly course Jesus again spoke of the Father giving him "power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him" (John 17:2). The statement "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) made by Jesus, is one which he made no attempt to qualify, and it does not behove any interpreter to restrict its meaning to "one in purpose". At face value it clearly means "one in all things" and Jesus would hardly have made such a striking claim without qualifying it if he had not intended to convey the impression that there was an absolute oneness between the Father and the Son and that he therefore possessed deity. It is no wonder the Jews so understood his claim (John 10:33).

Furthermore it is intriguing to find that Deedat has placed certain words in capitals in the verses referred to earlier, namely the statement of Jesus that no one could pluck his followers from his hand, nor from his Father's hand. How could Jesus make such a claim unless he possessed the same power to preserve his followers that his

Father possessed? It is surely clear to those whose eyes are not blinded by their presuppositions against the teaching of Jesus in the Bible, that Jesus did not claim that he was one with his Father in purpose alone *but also in the possession of the absolute, eternal power required to execute that purpose to complete effect.*

The whole problem with Deedat is that, being a Muslim, he approaches the Bible with the presumption that Jesus is not the eternal Son of God and so could never have claimed to be such. He therefore cannot read the Bible with an open mind and interpret it consistently. When he is met with plain statements that show that Jesus again and again claimed to be the Son of God, he cannot simply accept them. His presumptions oblige him to either overlook and ignore them when he cannot counter them, or misinterpret and pervert them whenever he thinks he can.

Towards the close of his booklet he mentions two incidents in the life of Jesus which prove this point very adequately. He finds an occasion where Jesus taught that to enter life, one must keep the commandments of God (Matthew 19:17) and makes much of this because such teaching seems to coincide with Islamic dogma. Here, however, he falls into the very trap he cautions against elsewhere in his booklet by wrenching this statement out of its context. What follows does not suit his argument so he ignores it. Jesus went on to show the young man he was addressing that no one can keep God's laws perfectly and so enter life in this way. The young man was very rich and Jesus said to him:

"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Matthew 19:21

It may be true today that "no one is perfect" but God surely is and he will judge us by his own standards of perfection. A limited attempt to keep his laws is not acceptable to him, and who keeps them perfectly? When Jesus made this young man realise that he could not do so, he showed him another way to life: *If you would be perfect...follow me.*

The second incident concerns the raising of Lazarus from dead. Because Jesus was moved in his spirit and prayed to his Father about the matter Deedat concludes that he could not have been the eternal Son of God. Once again, however, he casually ignores the context of this prayer and expediently overlooks an outstanding claim made by Jesus at the very time this wonderful miracle was performed:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall be live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." John 11:25

The words in the original Greek introducing this statement are emphatic, meaning, "I, I am the resurrection and the life," or, "I myself am the resurrection and the life." This means that Jesus himself, in a unique and absolute sense, is the resurrection and the life. It is little wonder that he is called the "Author of life" (Acts 3:15) elsewhere in the Bible. No one who did not have an eternal nature could ever have made such a claim. Such words can be spoken by one whose nature is deity alone.

The great mistake that Deedat makes when he reads the Bible is that he does not objectively seek to discover what it says, but approaches it with presumptions about what it *should* say. Christians read the Bible earnestly desiring to know what Jesus said about himself and throughout history they have universally drawn the conclusion that he taught that he was the eternal Son of God who came in human form to redeem the world. It is a conclusion they draw from an open assessment of the contents of the books they read. But men like Deedat have decided in advance, before they even pick up a Bible, what it *should* say about Jesus. Because he believes that Jesus was only a prophet and not the Son of God, he approaches the Bible with the presumption that it should support this belief and wherever he can he attempts to pervert or distort its teaching to yield this presumption.

Deedat is thus totally unqualified and unfit to interpret the Bible. How is it that the Christian Church has universally held that Jesus is the eternal Son of God if the Bible does not teach this? Deedat's attempts to disprove this do not arise from a sincere assessment of Biblical teaching but from a presumption that it should not yield such a doctrine. It is quite clear who is reading the book with "blinkers". It is the Islamic propagandist

whose ability to read the Bible sincerely and objectively is blinkered by his dogmatic presumption that it should not teach that Jesus is the Son of God.

In conclusion we can only say that he exposes himself in no uncertain terms when he attempts to treat John 1:1 in a supposedly scholarly way on pages 40-41 of his booklet. The whole verse reads:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

He says that the Greek word for God in the clause "and the Word was with God" is *hotheos* and that in the latter clause "and the Word was God" the word is *tontheos*. He relates a discussion between himself and a Reverend Morris in which his apparently exceptional knowledge of Greek allegedly enabled him to confound and silence the reverend completely. We stand absolutely amazed, for the supposed "Muslim scholar of the Bible" has done nothing but expose an appalling ignorance of the Greek text. It is in the first clause that the word is *tontheos* and in the second it is simply *theos*, that is, God. On this palpable error Deedat builds an apparently convincing argument in his booklet!

He says, therefore, that *tontheos* means "a god" and that John 1:1 therefore teaches that "the Word was a god". This supposedly disproves the deity of Jesus Christ. Yet the original Greek reads that *ho logos*, that is, "the Word", was *theos*, that is "God". The verse thus correctly reads "The Word was God", a statement comprehensively endorsing the deity of Christ. Thus Deedat's arguments slide completely to the ground through a shocking error of his own making, caused by his ignorance of the Bible. His booklets against the Christian faith constantly reveal two extremes - a bold confidence in his points on the one hand matched only by an obvious lack of substance in them on the other!

Surely little further evidence is needed to show that Deedat has little qualification of pose as a "Muslim scholar of the Bible". His arguments and confident manner might lead unwary Muslims who are ignorant of the Bible into thinking he is a great critic of the book but, as Jesus said, it is wrong and foolish to judge purely by appearances (John 7:24). As this reply to his *Christ in Islam* shows, a Christian with a sound knowledge of the Bible can disprove his arguments without much difficulty and at times with contemptuous ease. The glaring mistakes he makes and the perversion of Biblical teaching that he practises show conclusively that his crusade against Christianity is thoroughly unwarranted and that, in his attempts to expose the Bible, he really only succeeds in exposing himself.

THE GOD THAT "NEVER WAS"?

During 1983 the Islamic Propagation Centre published a booklet entitled *The God that Never Was*, which had first been published as an article in a local Muslim newspaper *Al-Balaagh* in 1980, as a response to a reply I had written to certain lectures against the Christian faith by Ahmed Deedat on cassette tapes. The booklet contains a large number of quotations from the Bible, chiefly from the four Gospels, which all relate to the earthly life Jesus lived for thirty-three years in human form. Each one of these quotes is headed by a title in which the name of Jesus is substituted by "God", and comments are made about his humanity which appear to ridicule the Christian belief in his deity. The author of the booklet sets out his purpose in these words:

In our headings and subheadings we have referred to Jesus as "God" in inverted commas in order to show the ABSURDITY of the claim of this man that Jesus is God! (*The God that Never Was*, pp. 2-3)

A brief selection of passages from the Gospels quoted in the booklet and the headings above them illustrate the manner in which the author has set out to ridicule the deity of Christ:

The Ancestors of "God": "The generations of Jesus Christ, the son for David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). (p.3)

"God" was Twelve Years Old when His Parents Took Him to Jerusalem: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast" (Luke 2:41-42). (p.6)

"God" Was a Tribal Jew: "The Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). (p.9)

As any reader of the booklet can see, the scriptures quoted relate primarily to the humanity of Jesus and his brief life on earth. The thrust of the essay is that Jesus could not have been God because he was a man and was subject to all the natural limitations of the human race (i.e. ancestry, nationality, human emotion, physical weakness, etc.).

The author of this essay, unnamed in the booklet but said to be one Mohammed Seepye in the issue of *Al-Balaagh* in which it occurs, has casually glossed over and paid no attention to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, but has instead set forth Christian belief in Jesus as God absolutely (that is, to the exclusion of the Father and the Holy Spirit and without reference to the office of Jesus as the Son of God). He knew that when Christians say that Jesus is God this means that he shares the divine nature of the Father (a point carefully made by me in the very quotations the article contains from my reply to Deedat's tapes) with the Holy Spirit in a threefold Trinity. But he has subtly reversed this by misrepresenting the Christian doctrine, setting it forth as a belief that God, the subject, is Jesus, and has based his whole argument on this premise.

Muslims rightly claim that Islam is often misunderstood and misrepresented in the West. That is true, but it is equally true to say that Muslims do the same thing with Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ. They either just do not understand of the deity of Christ or consciously misrepresent it to suit their purposes. It is a fundamental Christian doctrine that Jesus is the *Son of man* as well as the *Son of God*. There is no validity in any argument against the deity of Jesus which is based exclusively on the human limitations he deliberately assumed during his brief course on earth. It will be a welcome change to discover in Jesus as the Son of God based sincerely on that doctrine exactly as it is set forth in the Bible, and not on a misrepresentation of it such as we find in Seepye's article. There is one passage in the Bible that answers the whole theme of this article very comprehensively:

Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8

The Greek word for "form" used in this passage carries the meaning "essence" or "nature". An appropriate illustration of this meaning is our cliché "an apple to the core", meaning that it is an apple through and through. This is what the word used here for "form" means. The passage thus teaches that the original nature and essence of Jesus was that of deity alone and that, reverently speaking, "through and through". Nevertheless, unlike Adam, the first man, who sought to be like God by eating of the tree of good and evil, Jesus, though he was divine by nature and enjoyed the very same essence as the eternal Father in heaven, did not consider it essential to his glory to hold on to that status in heaven. Instead, in perfect humility, he condescended to become a man and was thus found in human "form" (that is, he became man through and through). As men are by nature servants of God he thus also took the "form" of a servant he was not a servant of God by nature. The point is that *he voluntarily put off his divine glory for a season and took human form so that he might redeem men and women and thus bridge the gap between God and man that sin had created*. This was the fundamental purpose of his coming to earth in human form.

His perfect humility and condescending grace led him even further than Adam, as a natural servant of God, had ever been required to go. He became *obedient unto death, even death on a cross*. From the throne of heaven he descended to the lowest places on earth. This, however, was done that sinful men might be raised to the high status of children of God through his redeeming work. In consequence of his plunge to the depths of human wretchedness God has raised him above the heights of the heavens:

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

Before him, in ages to come, in his eternal glory which he has now resumed, all man and all angels shall bow and acknowledge him, whether in praise or in belated deference to his true status.

In the light of the fact that he *took* human nature and voluntarily *chose* to subject himself to all the limitations and weaknesses of that nature, one can surely see that no case against his deity based on his humanity (including the ancestry he elected to share, the nationality he assumed, and the human course he adopted) has any substance. In virtually every case where the expression "God" appears in the headings in Seepye's article one can comfortably substitute the expression *the Son of man* without any inverted commas, and the titles make good sense. (I say in *virtually* every case deliberately, as some of the headings also misrepresent the meaning of the texts quoted underneath).

Christians do *not* say that "Allah is Christ, the son of Mary" as the Qur'an alleges they do (*innallaaha huwal Masihubnu Maryam* - Sura al-Ma'ida 5:72), that is, that God is Jesus. We believe that God is a Supreme Being in a threefold unity of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that the Son alone took human form as the man Christ Jesus.

We *do* believe that the Son is subject to the authority of the Father (the very titles imply an equality in essence and nature between them on the one hand and the subjection of one to the other on the other hand). We do also believe that the Son was sent into the world according to the Father's purpose and will, as Jesus himself said: "I came not of my own accord but he sent me" (John 8:42). Likewise we accept that he does nothing of his own accord but only what the Father wills and does and, because he is the eternal Son of God, has omnipotent power to put this divine will and activity into effect (John 5:19). These are basic Christian teachings.

The fundamental difference between the Christian and Muslim concepts of Christ is not in their understanding of his subjection to a higher authority, nor in their common conviction that he was a human being in every respect while on earth. With Muslims, we accept that he spoke only as he was commanded to speak (John 12:49) and that there is one greater than he (John 14:28). We differ primarily in our beliefs about his nature for Islam allows him no more than humanity and prophethood, whereas Christianity teaches that God spoke through him, not as a prophet, but as a Son through whom he made all things, who reflects his glory, and who "bears the very stamp of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3).

Booklets like *The God that Never Was* which represent Jesus in Christian doctrine as God absolutely, with no reference to the Father and the Holy Spirit or to his subjection to the former in authority, misrepresent Christianity altogether. Such publications accordingly serve no useful purpose. If Muslims would only assess this doctrine for what it really is, they would find it not as far removed from their own as they generally suppose, and would perhaps come to a truer and closer knowledge of who Jesus really is - not a "god" who "never was" but the eternal Son from heaven who truly remains the "same yesterday, today and forever"

Is Muhammad Foretold in the Bible?

by John Gilchrist

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MUHAMMAD IN THE BIBLE?

During 1975 Ahmed Deedat held a series of lectures at the Durban City Hall, two of which set out to prove that Muhammad is foretold in the Bible. The first lecture, entitled *What the Bible Says About Muhammad*, dealt with the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18.18 in the Old Testament, and in it Mr. Deedat sought to show that Moses was predicting the coming of Muhammad when speaking of a prophet to follow him who would be like him. During 1976 Mr. Deedat published this lecture in booklet form under the same title. In his second lecture in 1975 he spoke on *Muhammad the Natural Successor to Christ* and here he endeavoured to prove that Jesus was foretelling the coming of Muhammad when he exhorted his disciples to wait for the coming of the one he called the Comforter who, he said, would follow him.

Deedat's lectures were typical of numerous similar attempts that have been made by Muslim writers over the years to make these two particular prophecies fit Muhammad. The effort has generally arisen from a verse in the Qur'an which states that the coming of Muhammad was foretold in the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. It reads:

Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures) - in the Law and the Gospel. *Surah 7.157*

It is not surprising, therefore, to find that Muslims have searched exhaustively through the "Law and the Gospel" (the *Tawrat* and the *Injil*, the Old and New Testaments respectively) for proof that these two books indeed contain prophecies of the coming of Muhammad. The Qur'an seems to suggest that these prophecies would be found in the Torah and the Gospel without much difficulty, but when Muslims have applied themselves to finding these alleged predictions, they have been unpleasantly surprised to discover that in these two books it is Jesus who is the subject of the many prophecies in them and not Muhammad. The birth of Jesus, his ministry, parables, miracles, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, second coming, deity, glory and honour are the concerns of the prophetic texts of the Torah and the Gospel, and so extensively do these prophecies herald his advent as the ultimate climax of God's revealed truth and love towards men that one cannot help but be struck by the fact that the Bible makes no allowance for the anti-climax of a "prophet" to follow him. Such prophecies are conspicuous only by their absence.

Nevertheless, spurred on by the assurance in the Qur'an that the Bible indeed foretells the coming of Muhammad, Muslims have made every effort to find these prophecies. The obvious dearth of material in support of their quest has led most of them to wisely rely solely on the two prophecies we have already mentioned - one in each of the Testaments -, to prove their claim. Others, like Kaldani and Vidyarthi, have unwisely tried to apply every major prophecy in the Bible to Muhammad (including striking predictions of the crucifixion, atoning work and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Isaiah 53 for example!), but the shameless twists of interpretation that they have been compelled to resort to together with an abdication of all reason in their efforts to prove their points has fortunately restrained other Muslims from following in their steps and they have accordingly relied solely on the two prophecies we have mentioned, one by Moses and one by Jesus respectively.

We are in the circumstances entitled to presume that these two prophecies are believed by the Muslims to be the strongest in support of their claims. Accordingly, if it can be proved that these texts do not in any way refer to Muhammad, or anticipate his advent or prophethood, then the whole theory that Muhammad is foretold in the Bible must simultaneously fall to the ground.

We shall therefore in this booklet generously consider the strongest evidence of the Muslims that Muhammad is foretold in these two passages and will, in the light of the context of each passage, and of other factors crucial to a proper determination of the matter, decide whether the evidence is sufficient to prove the point or whether the case must ultimately be found to go against them.

It is universally accepted in all civilised communities that if a matter is to be determined properly, all the relevant evidence must be weighed together and all irrelevant evidence must be ignored accordingly. No matter how great the temptation may be to ignore the relevant facts while giving undue weight to the irrelevant ones if

this is the only way a matter can be decided in one's favour, the man who really loves the truth and seeks for it will resist the temptation. It is our sincere hope that the Muslims who read this document will do likewise.

MOSES AND THE PROPHET

"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him". *Deuteronomy 18.18*

Whenever Muslims seek to establish that Muhammad is foretold in the Torah, the Old Testament, they invariably refer to this verse as the one obvious prophecy in support of their claim. They argue that the prophet who was promised by God to Moses was Muhammad because:

1. The Qur'an is allegedly the Word of God and therefore, as Muhammad recited each passage that was delivered to him, he had the words of God put into his mouth in accordance with the words of this prophecy;
2. The prophet to come would be from among the brethren of the Israelites, hence the Ishmaelites, because Israel (Jacob) and Ishmael were both descended from Abraham, and the tribes who descended from the twelve sons of Ishmael are therefore "brethren" of the tribes who descended from the twelve sons of Israel. As Muhammad was the only Ishmaelite to claim prophethood in the line of the Old Testament prophets, they aver that the prophecy can only refer to him;
3. Muhammad was like Moses in so many ways that the prophecy can only refer to him.

We shall consider these claims briefly and will do so in the light of the context of the prophecy, for this is the only way that a correct interpretation of the text can be obtained. Every intelligent expositor of scripture knows that no passage can be fairly interpreted if it is isolated from its context. Therefore it is essential to quote from the whole passage in which the prophecy is found and the following two extracts are of great importance:

The Levitical priests, that is, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the offerings by fire to the Lord, and his rightful dues. They shall have no inheritance among their brethren; the Lord is their inheritance as he promised them. *Deuteronomy 18.1-2*

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren - him shall you heed - just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die'. And the Lord said to me, 'They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I shall command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die'. *Deuteronomy 18.15-20*

We shall proceed to briefly consider the three points that supposedly prove that Muhammad is the prophet referred to in the text and thereafter will, in the light of the context of the passage, discover precisely which prophet is referred to in the prophecy contained in Deuteronomy 18.18.

1. THE WORD OF GOD IN THE PROPHET'S MOUTH.

Christians do not believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God but, purely for the sake of argument, we shall proceed as if God did indeed put his words in Muhammad's mouth to discover whether this might prove that Muhammad is the prophet referred to in Deuteronomy 18.18. In our view the statement "I will put my words in his mouth" does not help to identify the prophet referred to at all. It is true of every prophet that God has put his words in his mouth. For God said to Jeremiah:

"Behold I have put my words in your mouth".
Jeremiah 1.9

Furthermore we also read in Deuteronomy 18.18 that the prophet to follow Moses "shall speak to them all that I command him". Now we read that Jesus once said to his disciples:

"For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me".

John 12.49-50.

A similar text which illustrates this point is found in the great prayer which Jesus prayed on the last night that he was with his disciples. He said:

"I have given them the words which thou gavest me".

John 17.8

In no way, therefore, can the identity of the prophet in the text of Deuteronomy 18.18 be established from the fact that God would put his words in his mouth. With every prophet who is true this is the case and the great prophet referred to in the text, who would be uniquely like Moses in a way that none of the other prophets were, must accordingly be identified from other sources.

2. A PROPHET FROM AMONG THEIR BRETHREN.

Muslims allege that the expression "their brethren" in Deuteronomy 18.18 means the brethren of the Israelites, hence the Ishmaelites. In this case, however, if we are truly to discover the real identity of the prophet who would be like Moses, we must consider the expression in its context.

God said, "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren." Of whom is God speaking when he speaks of "them" and "their"? When we go back to the first two verses of Deuteronomy 18 we find the answer:

"The Levitical priests, that is, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel ... they shall have no inheritance among their brethren".

Deuteronomy 18.1-2.

It is abundantly clear from these two verses that "they" refers to the tribe of Levi and that "their brethren" refers to the remaining eleven tribes of Israel. This is an inescapable fact. No honest method of interpretation or consistent method of exposition can possibly allow that Deuteronomy 18.18 refers to anyone else than the tribe of Levi and the remaining tribes of Israel. Let us briefly examine the only possible exposition of the prophecy that can lead to a correct interpretation and identification of "their brethren". We need only accentuate the relevant words from Deuteronomy 18.1-2 to discover the only possible conclusion that can be drawn. The text reads:

"The tribe of Levi shall have no inheritance with ISRAEL. They shall have no inheritance among THEIR BRETHREN".

Therefore the only logical interpretation of Deuteronomy 18.18 can be: "I will raise up for them (that is, the tribe of Levi) a prophet like you from among their brethren (that is, one of the other tribes of Israel)". Indeed throughout the Old Testament one often finds the expression "their brethren" meaning the remaining tribes of Israel as distinct from the tribe specifically referred to. Let us consider this verse as an example:

But the children of Benjamin would not listen to the voice of their brethren, the children of Israel.

Judges 20.13

Here "their brethren" is specifically stated to be the other tribes of Israel as distinct from the tribe of Benjamin. In Deuteronomy 18.18, therefore, "their brethren" clearly means the brethren in Israel of the tribe of Levi. Again in Numbers 8.26 the tribe of Levi is commanded to minister to "their brethren", that is, the remaining tribes of Israel. In 2 Kings 24.12 the tribe of Judah is distinguished from "their brethren", once again the remaining tribes of Israel. (Further scriptures proving the point are Judges 21.22, 2 Samuel 2.26, 2 Kings 23.9, 1 Chronicles 12.32, 2 Chronicles 28.15, Nehemiah 5.1 and others).

Indeed in Deuteronomy 17.15 we read that Moses on one occasion said to the Israelites "One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother". Only an Israelite could be appointed king of Israel - "one from among your brethren" - no foreigner, be he Ishmaelite, Edomite or whoever he may be, could be made King of Israel because he was not one of "their brethren", that is, a member of one of the tribes of Israel.

At this stage, therefore, we have a fatal objection to the theory that Muhammad is foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18. He was an Ishmaelite and accordingly is automatically disqualified from being the prophet whose coming was foretold in that verse. The prophet was obviously to come from one of the tribes of Israel other than the tribe of Levi. God said he would raise up a prophet for the Levites like Moses from among "their brethren", that is, from one of the other tribes of Israel. As we intend to prove that Jesus was the prophet whose coming was foretold it will be appropriate to mention at this stage that he was descended from the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1.2, Hebrews 7.14). He is therefore ably qualified to be the prophet who would be raised up from among the brethren of the Levites.

3. A PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES.

The Islamic publications listed in the Bibliography to this booklet are full of comparisons between Moses and Muhammad where evidence is brought forward of certain likenesses between them. These publications also produce many differences between Jesus and Moses as the authors try to disprove that Jesus is the prophet whose coming was foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18.

In his booklet "What the Bible Says About Muhammed" Mr. Deedat produces a number of similarities between Moses and Muhammad which he claims do not exist between Moses and Jesus. Most of these are meaningless, however, and only serve to show the supreme uniqueness of Jesus over against the whole human race. For example, Deedat argues that Moses and Muhammad were both born naturally of human parents and are buried on earth, whereas Jesus was born of a virgin-woman, had no earthly father, and ascended to heaven (Deedat, "What the Bible Says About Muhammed", p. 7, 12). It is obvious that all men have natural parents and go back to the dust, and all Mr. Deedat is doing is to reveal certain ways in which Jesus was absolutely unique among men. This does not help to identify the prophet predicted by Moses, however.

In the publications referred to we do find occasionally more prominent likenesses between Moses and Muhammad which do need to be analysed more carefully. Three such comparisons are:

1. Moses and Muhammad became the lawgivers, military leaders, and spiritual guides of their peoples and nations;
2. Moses and Muhammad were at first rejected by their own people, fled into exile, but returned some years later to become the religious and secular leaders of their nations;
3. Moses and Muhammad made possible the immediate and successful conquests of the land of Palestine after their deaths by their followers, Joshua and Umar respectively.

At the same time it is alleged in these publications that Jesus and Moses were so different, according to Christian belief, that Jesus cannot be the prophet referred to. Such differences are these:

1. Moses was only a prophet but, according to Christian belief, Jesus is the Son of God;
2. Moses died naturally but Jesus died violently;
3. Moses was the national ruler of Israel which Jesus was not at any time during his ministry here on earth.

We are constrained to ask: do these similarities and contrasts in any way prove that Muhammad is the prophet like Moses whose coming was foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18? It is the easiest of matters to show that this sort of reasoning will in no way assist us to discover the real identity of the prophet. Firstly, none of the alleged

differences between Moses and Jesus are of any importance. The Bible often calls Jesus a prophet as well as the Son of God (see, for example, Matthew 13.57, 21.11, and John 4.44) and the fact that Jesus died violently is hardly relevant to the issues at stake. Many prophets were killed by the Jews for their testimonies, a fact to which both the Bible and the Qur'an bear witness, (cf. Matthew 23.31, Surah 2.91). Furthermore the Bible teaches that the Christian Church as a whole has replaced the nation of Israel in this age as the collective object of God's special favours. Likewise, whereas Moses led that nation during his life on earth, so Jesus today heads the Church of God from his throne in heaven above. In this respect, therefore, he is really like Moses.

Secondly, if we reverse the process we can show many similarities between Moses and Jesus where Muhammad at the same time can be contrasted with them. Some of these are:

1. Moses and Jesus were Israelites - Muhammad was an Ishmaelite. (This is, as we have seen, a crucial factor in really determining the identity of the prophet who was to follow Moses).
2. Moses and Jesus both left Egypt to perform God's work - Muhammad was never in Egypt. Of Moses we read: "By faith he forsook Egypt" (Hebrews 11.27). Of Jesus we read: "Out of Egypt have I called my Son" (Matthew 2.15).
3. Moses and Jesus forsook great wealth to share the poverty of their people which Muhammad did not. Of Moses we read: "He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt" and that he chose "to share ill-treatment with the people of God" (Hebrews 11.25-26). Of Jesus we read: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8.9).

So we have similarities between Moses and Jesus where Muhammad can be contrasted with them. This shows how weak the Muslim method of comparing Moses with Muhammad (while contrasting them with Jesus) is, for it works both ways. How then can we truly identify the prophet who was to be like Moses?

As there were numerous prophets down the ages, it is logical to assume that this prophet would be uniquely like Moses in a way that none of the other prophets were. Clearly the prophet to come would emulate him in the exceptional and unique characteristics of his prophethood. Indeed we would expect that God would give some indication in the prophecy of the distinguishing features of this prophet who was to be like Moses. We only have to refer to the context of the prophecy to find this striking verse which very clearly gives us an indication of the nature of the prophet to follow:

"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren - him you shall heed - just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die' ".
Deuteronomy 18.15-16.

The prophet would be raised up just as God had raised Moses up as the mediator of the covenant which he gave at Horeb. The Israelites pleaded with Moses to become a mediator between them and God because they did not wish to hear God's voice face to face, and God said "They have rightly said all that they have spoken" (Deuteronomy 18.17). God henceforth raised Moses up as the mediator of the covenant between himself and Israel. We need also to consider that God spoke to Moses in a very special way as well and in the Bible we read:

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.
Exodus 33.11

The Qur'an also teaches that God spoke directly to Moses in a way in which he did not speak to other prophets (Surah 4.164). Furthermore, to confirm the great mediatorial work which Moses was to perform, God did great signs and miracles through him in the presence of all Israel. Now as God had promised that the prophet to come would be like him in this mediatorial work, we must conclude that the distinguishing features of the prophet would be these:

1. He would be the direct mediator of a covenant between God and his people;

2. He would know God face to face;

3. His office would be confirmed by great signs and wonders which he would do by the power of God in the sight of all the nation of Israel.

This conclusion is in fact clearly established by these last words in the Book of Deuteronomy:

And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Deuteronomy 34.10-12.

The three distinguishing features of Moses as a prophet are clearly mentioned: he was the mediator between God and Israel, he knew the Lord face to face, and he did great signs and wonders. The prophet like him would obviously have to emulate these unique features of his prophethood. Did Muhammad possess these exceptional characteristics by which the prophet was to be recognised?

Firstly, whereas God spoke directly to Moses, so that he was a direct mediator between God and the people of Israel, the Qur'an is alleged to have come at all times from the Angel Gabriel to Muhammad and at no time did God directly communicate it to him face to face, as the Muslims themselves admit. He also did not mediate a covenant between God and the people of Israel.

Secondly, Muhammad performed no signs and wonders. Although the Hadith record some fanciful miracles, these are purely mythical, for the Qur'an very clearly says of Muhammad that he performed no signs. In Surah 6.37, when Muhammad's adversaries say "Why has no sign been sent down to him from his Lord?", Muhammad is bidden to reply merely that God could send one if he wanted to but had not done so. In the same Surah we read that Muhammad said, "I have not that for which you are impatient" (Surah 6.57), meaning signs and wonders such as Moses had. He goes on to say that if he had had them, the dispute between him and them would have been decided long ago.

Again in the same Surah Muhammad's adversaries say they will believe if signs come from God, but he only replies that God has reserved them because they would still disbelieve anyway (as indeed the Jews did with Jesus - John 12.37). Furthermore the Qur'an also says that Muhammad's adversaries in Mecca also once said to him:

"Why are not (signs) sent to him, like those which were sent to Moses?"
Surah 28.48

The answer the Qur'an gives is much the same - they rejected the signs of Moses anyway, so why do they now expect Muhammad to perform signs? Nevertheless, in terms of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 18.18, this was a very poignant and significant observation for it plainly distinguishes between Moses and Muhammad in the very important matter of performing signs and wonders. How indeed could Muhammad possibly be the prophet whose coming was foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18 if he was not granted the power to perform the kind of signs and wonders performed by Moses? In this case, therefore, he was definitely not like Moses in one of the vital, distinguishing characteristics of his prophethood. The Qur'an has its own testimony to this effect.

So we find that Muhammad was not a direct mediator between God and man, nor could he do any signs and wonders to confirm his office. Deuteronomy 34.11 makes it essential that the prophet like Moses would do similar signs and wonders to those which Moses did, and as Muhammad did not, we have a second fatal objection against the theory that he is the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18. We can conclude by saying that whatever evidence the Muslims may produce in favour of their assertion, the really relevant and crucial evidence needed to prove the point is not only unfavourable in his case but in fact fatally rules out the possibility that he might indeed be the prophet of whom Moses spoke.

4. JESUS - THE PROPHET LIKE UNTO MOSES.

Considering now whether Jesus is the prophet referred to, let us begin by answering a few typical objections raised by the Muslims. Firstly, if he was the Christ, they say he could not be the prophet to follow Moses, because the Jews distinguished between Elijah, the Christ, and the prophet (John 1. 19-21). The argument goes that John the Baptist is believed by the Christians to have come in the spirit of Elijah, Jesus was the Christ, and Muhammad, therefore, must have been the prophet. We have already shown, however, that it is impossible for Muhammad to be the prophet. In any even nothing conclusive can be construed from the speculations of the Jews. They once said of Jesus: "This is indeed the prophet" (John 7.40). On another occasion they said he was "one of the prophets" (Matthew 16.14), on another "a prophet" (Mark 6.15) and worse still thought of him as both Elijah (Mark 6.15) and John the Baptist himself (Matthew 16.14).

It needs to be pointed out that the Bible does not teach that Elijah, the Christ, and the prophet were to come in that order. The questions put by the Jews to John, whether he was Elijah, the Christ, or the prophet, merely expressed their own hopes and expectations of figureheads to come. In the light of their confusion, however, we can see that no serious consideration can be given to the distinctions they made between the Christ and the prophet. It is also important to note that the predictions of the prophet, etc., were made in the reverse order in the Old Testament (the prophet was promised by Moses, most of the prophecies of the coming Christ were set out in the writings of the later prophets, and the promise of the coming of Elijah only appears at the end of the book in Malachi 4.5). Furthermore no deliberate distinction between the prophet and the Christ was ever drawn in these prophecies and it is not surprising to find the Jews in one breath proclaiming that Jesus was indeed both the prophet and the Christ (John 7.40-41).

Another favourite objection is that Jesus died at the hands of the Jews and God said, in Deuteronomy 18.20, that only the self-styled prophets would die. Every prophet, however, died - many violently as the Qur'an and the Bible jointly testify - and the mere physical death of a prophet was certainly no evidence against his divine mission. God obviously did not mean that every true prophet would not die! What he meant was that a false prophet was to be put to death and would perish eternally - and all his prophecies with him. Only Judgment Day will reveal all the false prophets of the ages.

What we are ultimately concerned about is this - God gave a definite promise that a prophet would arise like Moses who would mediate another covenant and that signs would accompany this covenant to confirm its heavenly origin. The very Bible that contains the prophecy of the prophet to come confirms quite clearly that that prophet was Jesus Christ. The Apostle Peter, claiming that God had foretold the coming of Jesus Christ through all the prophets, appealed specifically to Deuteronomy 18.18 as proof that Moses had done so (Acts 3.22). Jesus himself said, "Moses wrote of me" (John 5.46) and it is difficult to find elsewhere in the five books of Moses such a direct prophecy of his advent. Peter chose Deuteronomy 18.18 as the one distinctive prophecy in all the writings of Moses of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world.

Likewise in Acts 7.37 Stephen appealed to Deuteronomy 18.18 as proof that Moses was one of those who had "announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One", Jesus, the one whom the Jews had recently betrayed and crucified.

After witnessing all the signs that Jesus had done and after taking part in the New Covenant which he had mediated face-to-face between God and his people, the early Christians knew that Jesus was the prophet whose coming was foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18. They also knew that the prophecy of a prophet to come like Moses had been supplemented by God's promise to the prophet Jeremiah that he would mediate a new covenant in the days to come between himself and his people. For in speaking of this new covenant God clearly distinguished between it and the old covenant he had made with Moses and it was therefore obvious that the one who would mediate it would be the prophet whose coming Moses had foretold. God said:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within

them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each man teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more".

Jeremiah 31.31-34.

"I will make a new covenant", God said, thereby confirming the promise in Deuteronomy 18 that a prophet would come to mediate between God and his people in the likeness of Moses. The promised new covenant was directly compared with the covenant God had made with Moses. The covenant would be different to that given through Moses but the prophet who would mediate it would be like him. It is therefore quite obvious that the prophet whose coming was foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18 would be the one to mediate this new covenant between God and his people. And we read: "Therefore Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant" (Hebrews 9.15). To ratify the first covenant we read that:

Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'.

Exodus 24.8

Just as the first covenant had therefore been ratified by the blood of a sacrificial offering, so the prophet to follow Moses would be like him and would also ratify God's new covenant with blood. And Jesus therefore said:

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood".

1 Corinthians 11.25

God's promise of the coming of a prophet like Moses who would mediate a new covenant was one of the great blessings in the days preceding the advent of Jesus Christ. Although God mediated the old covenant through Moses, the blazing fire the Israelites saw together with the tempests and other portents made them "entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given" (Hebrews 12.19-20). They all broke the covenant (Jeremiah 31.31) and died in the wilderness like flies (1 Corinthians 10.5). They failed to receive the life that was promised to those who abided by the old covenant.

Therefore God promised to their descendants that he would raise up another prophet like Moses and would mediate a new covenant through him which God's people would both give heed to and obtain the promised blessings accompanying it - true knowledge of God, forgiveness of sins, power to keep God's law, and the public favour of God (Jeremiah 31.33-34). This new covenant Jesus brought in in due time.

Unlike the Israelites under the old covenant who fell by the wayside, the people of God through this new covenant have come "to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12.23-24). This is the covenant which Jesus brought in.

Jesus therefore is the promised prophet like Moses for he mediated the new covenant between God and his people. Like Moses (and in a way in which no other prophet could compare), he also knew God face-to-face and became a direct mediator between God and men. "I know him, I come from him, and he sent me", Jesus said (John 7.29). Again he proclaimed: "No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11.27). And yet again Jesus said: "Not that anyone has ever seen the Father except him who is from God - he has seen the Father" (John 6.46). And what further evidence do we need that Jesus knew God face-to-face and is the direct mediator between him and men than these two verses: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me ... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14.6, 14.9).

When he spoke to God face-to-face, "Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him" (Exodus 34. 29-30). When the image of the invisible God was directly revealed through the transfigured face of Jesus Christ, "his face did shine as the sun" (Matthew 17.2). No other prophet could claim such a distinction - no one else knew God face-to-face in such a way that his face shone while he communed with him.

Not only was the new covenant mediated through Jesus who knew God face-to-face as Moses had done, but he too performed great signs and wonders to confirm his mediatorial work. One of the greatest signs that Moses did was to control the sea: "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind" (Exodus 14.21). Although other prophets had power over rivers (Joshua 3.13, 2 Kings 2.14), no other prophet emulated him in controlling the sea until Jesus came and we read that his disciples exclaimed "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (Matthew 8.27). He caused a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee to cease with just three words: "Peace - be still" (Mark 4.39).

Another of the great signs that Moses did was the feeding of the Israelites with bread from heaven. When the Israelites at the time of Jesus saw him perform a similar miracle by feeding no less than five thousand people with just a few loaves of bread they were convinced that he was the promised prophet.

When the people saw the sign which he had done, they said, 'This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world'.

John 6.14

When they saw the sign, they said "This is the prophet". They knew well enough that the promised prophet would be recognised among other things by the performance of signs similar to those which Moses had done. When Jesus gave no indication of repeating the sign, the Israelites recalled that Moses had performed his feat for forty years unabated. So they said to Jesus, "What sign do you do that we may see and believe you?" (John 6.30), appealing to Moses' act of sustaining the lives of their forefathers in the wilderness. Jesus replied:

"I am the Bread of Life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh".

John 6.48-51.

In every way he gave proof that he was the prophet who was to come - one to mediate a covenant like that mediated through Moses at Horeb - one who would know God face-to-face - one who would perform great signs and wonders as Moses had done. In every way the Jews were right on this one point when they said "This is really the prophet" (John 7.40).

So it is proved that Muhammad is not foretold in Deuteronomy 18.18 but rather that the prophet whose coming was foretold in that verse was Jesus Christ. We shall go on to see that if Muhammad is not foretold on the Old Testament, neither is he foretold in the New Testament.

We shall again see that Jesus Christ is the climax of all prophecy in all the revealed scriptures of God. For all the promises, revelations and blessings of God are vested in him - the fountainhead of the love and favour of God towards men.

For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him, to the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 1.20

We shall also see, even more clearly, that in the Torah and the Gospel there is only one Saviour, one man alone through whom the favour of God can be obtained. While there were many prophets in ages past - both true and false - yet for us there is only one Lord and one Saviour - Jesus Christ. Again it will be seen how deeply God wishes to impress this truth upon all men that they may believe in and follow Jesus Christ into the Kingdom of Heaven.

For all who do not heed his words or believe in him with all their hearts, there remains only a "fearful prospect of judgment" (Hebrews 10.27) when God will fulfill his warning in Deuteronomy 18.19 by requiring of them their unbelief in the Saviour he sent and he will surely dismiss them, one and all, from his presence for ever and ever.

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.

Acts 16.31

JESUS AND THE COMFORTER

Whenever Muslims seek to prove that Muhammad is foretold in the New Testament, they immediately appeal to the promise of Jesus that the "Comforter" would follow him and claim that this Comforter was Muhammad (particularly as in the Qur'an, Jesus is alleged to have foretold the coming of Muhammad in Surah 61.6 in similar language). Whereas the Revised Standard Version uses the word "Counsellor" rather than "Comforter", we shall use the word "Comforter" throughout this chapter because it is more familiar to the Muslims. The texts where the Comforter is mentioned by Jesus are:

"And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you".

John 14.16-17.

"But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you".

John 14.26

"But when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me".

John 15.26

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you".

John 16.7

It is generally alleged by Muslims that the Greek word "paracletos" (meaning Comforter, Counsellor, Advocate, etc., in effect, one who unites men to God) is not the original word but that Jesus in fact foretold the coming of Muhammad by name and that the translation of his name into Greek (or at least the meaning of his name in Greek) is "periklutos", that is, the "praised one".

There is not a shred of evidence in favour of the assertion that the original word was "periklutos". We have thousands of New Testament manuscripts pre-dating Islam and not one of these contains the word "periklutos". In view of the fact that Muslims are prone to levelling false allegations that Christians are regularly changing the Bible, it is rather intriguing to find that they have no scruples about doing this themselves when it suits them to do so. In any event a cursory reading of the texts where the word "paracletos" appears will show that this is the only word that suits the context as I will show in one instance later on in this chapter.

Some wiser Muslims admit that "paracletos" is correct, but they claim in any event that Muhammad was the Comforter whom Jesus was referring to. Let us briefly examine some of the texts in a truly exegetical manner to discover whether Muhammad is indeed the Comforter whose coming Jesus foretold.

It is quite obvious from the four texts quoted that Comforter, Holy Spirit, and Spirit of Truth are interchangeable terms and that Jesus is speaking of the same person in each instance. The one obvious fact that emerges is that the Comforter is a spirit. (The fact that Jesus always speaks of the Spirit in the masculine gender in no way suggests that the Comforter must be a man as some of the publications in the Bibliography suggest. God himself is always spoken of in both the Bible and the Qur'an in the masculine gender and God is spirit - John 4.24. In the same way Jesus always speaks of the Comforter as a spirit and not as a man).

If we apply sound exegesis to John 14.16-17 we shall discover no less than eight reasons why the Comforter cannot possibly be Muhammad.

1. "He will give YOU another Comforter".

Jesus promised his disciples that God would send the Comforter to them. He would send the Spirit of Truth to Peter, and to John, and to the rest of the disciples - not to Meccans. Medinans or Arabians.

2. "He will give you ANOTHER Comforter".

If, as Muslims allege, the original word was periklutos and that Christians changed it into paracletos, then the sentence would have read, "He will give you another praised one". This statement is both out of place in its context and devoid of support elsewhere in the Bible. Jesus is never called the "periklutos" in the Bible (the word appears nowhere in the Bible) so it is grossly unlikely that he would have said "He will give you another praised one" when he never used that title for himself. Worse still, as the Muslims allege that he actually foretold the coming of Muhammad by mentioning his name, the sentence in that case would have read "He will give you another Muhammad". The further the Muslims try to press the point, the more absurd it tends to become.

John 16.12-13 makes it clear that the word "paracletos" is obviously the correct one. The text reads: "I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth". In other words, I have been your Comforter, your paracletos, and have many things to tell you, but I send the Spirit of Truth to you, another Comforter, another paracletos.

In 1 John 2.1 we read that Christians have an "advocate" with the Father, "Jesus Christ the Righteous", and the word translated "advocate" is paracletos in the Greek. So Jesus is our paracletos, our Comforter and advocate with the Father, and he promised to give his disciples another Comforter. It is therefore logical to find that Jesus promised another paracletos when he himself was described as the paracletos of his followers, but it is illogical to suggest that he would speak of "another periklutos" when the word was never used to describe him in the first place.

3. "To be with you FOREVER".

When Muhammad came he did not stay with his people forever but died in 632 AD and his tomb is in Medina where his body has lain for over 1300 years. Nevertheless Jesus said that the Comforter, once he had come, would never leave his disciples, but would be with them forever.

4. "The Spirit of Truth whom the world CANNOT receive".

The Qur'an says that Muhammad came as a universal messenger to men (Surah 34.28). If so, Jesus was not referring to Muhammad for he said that the world cannot receive the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth.

5. "You KNOW him".

It is quite obvious from this statement that the disciples knew the Spirit of Truth. As Muhammad was only born more than five hundred years later, it certainly could not be him. The next clause brings out just how the disciples knew him. At this stage we can see quite clearly that the Comforter is a spirit who was in the disciples' presence already.

6. "He dwells WITH you".

Where did the Comforter dwell with them? From various verses, especially John 1.32, we can see that the Spirit was in Jesus himself and so was with the disciples.

7. "He will be IN you".

Here the death-blow is dealt to the theory that Muhammad is the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. As the Spirit was in Jesus, so he would be in the disciples as well. The Greek word here is "en" and this means "right inside". So Jesus was in fact saying "he will be right inside you".

8. The last reason is really a re-emphasis of the first one. Do you notice how often Jesus addresses his own disciples when he speaks of the sphere of influence of the Comforter? "You know him ... he dwells with you ... he will be in you". Quite clearly the disciples were to anticipate the coming of the Comforter as a spirit who would come to them just after Jesus had left them. No other interpretation can possibly be drawn from this text. Only wishful thinking makes the Muslims allege that Muhammad was foretold by Jesus, but a practical interpretation of the texts destroys this possibility.

Let us read how the Spirit came to Jesus: "The Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove" (Luke 3.22). We read that the Spirit, the Comforter, came to the disciples in a similar way just after the ascension of Jesus (as Jesus told them he would): "And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2.3-4). He was with the disciples in the person of Jesus while he was still with them, and he was in the disciples from the day of Pentecost. We thus see the prediction Jesus made in John 14.17 duly fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Within only ten days after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples duly received the Comforter as he was promised to them by Jesus. He had told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, should come (Acts 1.4-8) as indeed he did while they were all together praying for his advent in the city. Muhammad is right out of this picture.

Moving on now to John 16.7 (quoted earlier), the whole meaning of this verse also becomes clear from the statement of Jesus, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now" (John 16.12). Jesus also said: "It is to your advantage that I go away" (John 16.7). The disciples could not bear his teaching now because they were ordinary men devoid of power to comprehend or apply what he said. The Spirit of Truth was indeed in Jesus, but was not yet in his disciples, so they were unable to follow the spiritual elements in his teaching. But after the ascension they received the Spirit and could now communicate and understand his teaching because the Spirit of Truth was in them as well. That is why Jesus said "it is to your advantage that I go away". This is made equally clear elsewhere in the Bible:

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is from God, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God.

1 Corinthians 2.9-13.

Paul makes it plain that the Spirit had already been given and if it had not, it could not have been to any advantage to the disciples to be without Jesus once he had ascended to heaven.

So it is abundantly proved that Muhammad is not the Spirit of Truth, the Comforter, whose coming Jesus foretold. Who is the Comforter then? He is the very Spirit of the living God as can be seen from some of the quotations already given. On the day when the Comforter duly came upon the disciples, his coming was accompanied by a tremendous sound, "like the rush of a mighty wind" (Acts 2.2). When the Jews heard this, they rushed together to see what was happening. Peter declared to them all:

"This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh' ".

Acts 2.16-17.

The Comforter, the Spirit of God, had come down on the disciples as Jesus had promised and was to be given to believing Christian men and women from every nation under the sun. But notice how Peter linked the coming of the Spirit with the ascension of Christ:

"This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear". Acts 2.32-33.

Clearly the coming of the Comforter was inseparably linked to the risen, ascended glory of Jesus in the highest place that heaven affords. The Comforter is also called "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8. 9) and the reason is plain from what Jesus said:

1. "He will glorify me" (John 16.14).
2. "He will bear witness to me" (John 15.26).
3. "He will convince the world concerning sin because they do not believe in me" (John 16. 8-9).

4. "He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16.14).

5. "He will bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (John 14.26).

Quite obviously the great work of the Comforter is to bring people to Jesus, to make them see him as Saviour and Lord, and to draw them to him. The Comforter was given so that the glory of Jesus might be revealed to men and in men. A beautiful example of this is given by the Apostle John:

His disciples did not understand this at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that this had been written of him and done to him.

John 12.16

Without the Spirit, they had no understanding, but when they received the Spirit after Jesus was glorified, then they remembered as Jesus said they would. John illustrates this in this passage as well:

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, 'If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'. Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

John 7.37-39.

As soon as Jesus was glorified the Spirit was given so that the glory of Jesus in heaven might become real to men here on earth. As Peter said (Acts 2.33), once Jesus was exalted at the right hand of God, the Spirit was freely given to his disciples.

Again Peter said, "The God of our fathers glorified Jesus" (Acts 3.13). We cannot see or comprehend this glory of Jesus here on earth (and Jesus himself said, "I do not receive glory from men" John 5.41), but he sent the Spirit so that we might behold this glory by the eye of faith. As Jesus himself said to his disciples of the Spirit:

"He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine, therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you".

John 16.14-15.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God and he is given to all true believers so that the glory of Jesus in heaven may become real to men on earth. John makes it plain how a man receives the Holy Spirit:

Now this he spoke about the Spirit, which those who BELIEVED in him were to receive.

John 7.39

To receive the Comforter, the Spirit of God, one must believe in Jesus and surrender body and soul to him.

Without the Spirit no one sees or believes in the glory of Christ, but for those who are his true followers and who are sanctified by the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 1.2), Peter says:

Without having seen him, you love him, though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1.8-9.

The distinction between those who have received the Spirit and those who have not, those who have beheld the glory of Christ and those who have not, comes out very clearly as Peter continues to speak to his fellow-believers:

To you therefore who believe, he is precious, but for those who do not believe, 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner'.

1 Peter 2.7

The Bible says much about the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, but the great and most handsome work of the Spirit is summed up in Jesus' words:

"HE WILL GLORIFY ME".

John 16.14

Although the Spirit had been at work in the world before the advent of Jesus Christ, and had indeed filled many of the great prophets and men of old with a longing for the coming Christ, he only finally united himself to men, and men to God, and indeed true believers to one another after the resurrection and ascension of Christ to heaven.

Jesus Christ spoke to his OWN disciples of the coming of the Comforter because the Spirit was sent down to comfort and regenerate all true believers in Jesus. This is one of the most significant and consistent elements of the teaching of Jesus about the Comforter. The prime purpose of the coming of the Comforter - immediately after the ascension of Jesus - was to draw men to him so that those who are influenced by the work of the Comforter will therefore become followers of Jesus. It is further evidence against the theory that Muhammad was the Comforter for, whereas the Comforter would not speak of himself but only of Jesus, Muhammad drew attention away from Jesus to himself, describing himself as the ultimate apostle of God to be followed and obeyed. The Comforter was never to do a thing like this. Jesus made it plain that the Comforter would draw the attention and faith of all men to himself and would glorify him before the eyes of faith of true believers as the Lord of glory in heaven.

After Jesus Christ had ascended to heaven to be glorified at the right hand of God above all the angels and departed saints, the Comforter came immediately upon his disciples to make this glory real to them and through them to spread it all over the world. For Jesus Christ is the very image of the Father's glory. In him are all things united, whether in heaven or on earth. He is the climax of God's plan for the fulness of time. He is the beginning and the end of all God's gracious work in all ages - for all the salvation and glory that God has prepared for those who love him are vested in Jesus.

The Comforter came to give us a foretaste of this glory. He came to make the resplendent glory of Jesus real to those who follow him. As Moses encouraged his people to look forward to the prophet who would be like him, who would mediate a new covenant to save all who truly believe, so the Comforter encourages Christ's followers in this age to look up to the risen, ascended, Lord Jesus Christ who sits on the throne of God in eternal glory above the heavens.

Far from Muhammad being foretold in the Bible, every prophecy, every agent of God, every true prophet and spirit, looks upward towards the radiance of the Father's glory, the one who sits upon the throne, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ ascended to heaven - God took him to himself. For Jesus alone is the Redeemer of the world. He alone is able, as a man, to enter the holy presence of the Father's throne and fill it with his own glorious majesty. So likewise he is able to reconcile sinful men to God and will one day be seen again in all his splendour as he comes to call his own - those who eagerly awaited his coming before his time and all those who since his sojourn on this earth look forward to his return from heaven - to be with him where he is to behold with awe the glory which the Father gave him in his love for him before the foundation of the world.

Moses rejoiced to see his day when speaking of the prophet to come. The Comforter today still rejoices to reveal his glory and majesty to those in whom he dwells. The angels and departed saints await with longing for the day when he shall be revealed to all the universe in all his magnificence - when all men shall be raised from the dead to see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, a day when the Comforter's work will be finally completed, a day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that it is Jesus Christ who is Lord - to the everlasting glory of God the Father - Amen!

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Origins and Sources of the Gospel of Barnabas

by John Gilchrist

An Analysis of the Gospel of Barnabas

Introduction

1. Was Barnabas really its author?

2. Evidence of its Medieval Origin

3. Other Evidences against its Authenticity

4. Who Really Composed this Forgery?

Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Although the Gospel of Barnabas has in recent years been distributed fairly widely throughout the Muslim world in many languages, most Muslims have not as yet seen a copy of this book. Nevertheless the knowledge of its existence is fairly widespread in the Muslim community.

Since 1973 the English translation of the Gospel of Barnabas by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg has been reprinted in large numbers by the Begum Aisha Bawany Wakf in Pakistan and a number of these reprints have come into worldwide circulation. The general position, however, is that most Muslims remain largely ignorant of the book and its contents as a whole.

It has been a blissful ignorance. For too long many Muslims have been persuaded that this book tells the ultimate truth about the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. It alleges that Jesus was not the Son of God, that he was not crucified, and that he foretold the coming of Muhammad. As a result some Muslims believe that this is the true Injil that was given to Jesus. The Gospel of Barnabas, however, does not claim to be the Injil but actually distinguishes itself from the book allegedly given to Jesus. In the following passage we find this distinction very clearly brought out:

The angel Gabriel presented to him as it were a shining mirror, a book, which descended into the heart of Jesus, in which he had knowledge of what God hath done and what he hath said, and what God willeth insomuch that everything was laid bare and open to him; as he said unto me: 'Believe, Barnabas, that I know every prophet with every prophecy, insomuch that whatever I say the whole hath come forth from that book'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.9).

Other Muslims believe that the Gospel of Barnabas is the "original testament" and that the Christians have substituted it with the "New Testament". Such an attitude betrays a woeful ignorance, not only of the Gospel of Barnabas, but also of the structure of the Christian Bible as a whole.

Because we are persuaded, however, that ignorance is a great evil - no matter how blissful it may be - and because ignorance is the handmaid of error, we deem it necessary to set out the true facts about the Gospel of Barnabas so that it may be clear to Muslim peoples everywhere that this book is a patent forgery of the Middle Ages and that the Muslims will be doing the cause of truth a great service by admitting once and for all that the Gospel of Barnabas is of no historical value at all and that it is to be rejected as a genuine account of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

This booklet does not purport to be a contribution to the ongoing scholarly study that is being conducted in the Christian world into the background and origins of the Gospel of Barnabas. For this we are chiefly indebted to the Ragg, who first translated the Gospel into English, and to men like Gairdner, Jomier and Slomp who have gone to great lengths in the cause of truth to provide substantial evidence of the falsehood of the Gospel of Barnabas. Rather we have endeavoured to produce here in summary form some of the clear proofs which have come from these studies so that our Muslim friends may see that the Gospel of Barnabas is a forgery which has become a lamentable red-herring across the trail of Christian-Muslim apologetics in the modern world.

It has been our purpose in some small measure to convey to the Muslim community worldwide some of the fruits of these studies. We have done this purely because we believe that it is deeply regrettable that men should believe that this book is a true account of the life of Jesus Christ.

Because we believe that no lover of truth will wish to be deluded by a counterfeit for long, we have elected to reveal briefly to our Muslim readers some of the origins and sources of the Gospel of Barnabas. We trust that our readers will peruse this booklet with a genuine desire to know where the Gospel of Barnabas really came from and when it was really written - and that they will draw a fair conclusion from the evidence set forth in the following pages of this booklet.

1. Was Barnabas really its author?

This book professes to be a Gospel and alleges that its author was the Apostle Barnabas. We must therefore begin by enquiring who the man Barnabas really was and at the same time must decide whether he is the author of the book we are considering in this booklet. To do this we must make some comparisons between the knowledge that we have of the real Apostle Barnabas in the Bible and the professed author of the Gospel of Barnabas. At the beginning and end of this book two comments appear which immediately assist us in our quest. They are these:

Many, being deceived of Satan, under pretence of piety, are preaching most impious doctrine, calling Jesus son of God, repudiating the circumcision ordained of God for ever, and permitting every unclean meat: among whom Paul also hath been deceived. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.2).

Others preached that he really died, but rose again. Others preached, and yet preach, that Jesus is the son of God, among whom is Paul deceived. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.273).

The author of this book uses strong language to denounce the teaching of Paul in particular, especially regarding circumcision; the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Jesus; and the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God. The whole book abounds in discourses levelled against those things which the author particularly takes Paul to task for, and there can be no doubt that the author of this book is poles apart from Paul and his doctrine and is diametrically opposed to his preaching and teaching.

This is the first of many evidences against the authenticity of this book for whoever wrote it expediently appended the name "Barnabas" to it as its author, whereas only a brief reflection on the actual profile of the real Apostle Barnabas will show that he cannot possibly be the author of this book.

Let us briefly go through the history of Barnabas in the Bible. He only appears among the apostles after the ascension of Jesus to heaven when the early Christian Church was taking root in the land of Palestine. As a gesture of faith and love towards his brethren, he sold a field he owned and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution at their discretion to those who were in need among the brethren. This gesture of kindness was a great source of encouragement to the believers and the apostles accordingly named him "Bar-nabas", which means "Son of encouragement". Before this he had been known only by his common name Joseph (Acts 4.36).

Here the author of the Gospel of Barnabas makes his first serious blunder for he suggests throughout his book, not only that Barnabas was actually one of the twelve disciples of Jesus during his ministry on earth, but also that he was known by this name "Barnabas" throughout that period of ministry. On more than one occasion in the book we find that Jesus allegedly addressed him by name and the first occasion, which comes particularly early in the book, is this one:

Jesus answered: 'Be not sore grieved, Barnabas; for those whom God hath chosen before the creation of the world shall not perish' (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.21).

Now we have here a patent anachronism which destroys the possibility that this book was really written by the Apostle Barnabas. The apostles only gave him the name "Barnabas" (Son of encouragement) after the ascension of Jesus because of the generous act he had done which had heartened the spirits of the early Christians. But the Gospel of Barnabas makes Jesus call him by this name some three years before he ascended to heaven. This is a serious - in our view fatal - objection to the claim that this book was written by the Apostle Barnabas.

As we press on in our study of the life of Barnabas, however, we find further proofs that destroy the claim that this book was really written by him. The next time he appears in the early events of the Church was on the occasion of Paul's first visit to all the apostles in Jerusalem. Because the apostles knew that Paul had in previous years been a relentless persecutor of the early Christians (primarily because they believed that Jesus was the Son of God!), the apostles and other Christians in Jerusalem doubted whether he really was now converted to their faith. It is indeed a revelation to discover, in the light of the vehement attacks made on Paul in the Gospel of Barnabas, just who it was who went to great pains to assure the brethren in Jerusalem that Paul was really a disciple:

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. Acts 9.27

We are now confronted with a second serious chain of evidence against the suggestion that Barnabas was the author of the "Gospel" attributed to him. Only seven verses earlier we read that when Paul engaged in public preaching in the synagogue of Damascus, "immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God'." (Acts 9.20). When this same Paul came to Jerusalem, it was Barnabas who vigorously defended him as a true disciple of Jesus.

What a contrast we have here with the book we are considering where the author, supposedly Barnabas, takes Paul to task for the very fact that he was proclaiming that Jesus was the Son of God. The true Barnabas was the right-hand man of this very Paul who publicly taught that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. It is this same Barnabas who represented him at Jerusalem and who spared no effort in persuading the disciples there that Paul really was a disciple of Jesus.

Later on in this booklet we shall show that the Gospel of Barnabas was first written not earlier than fourteen centuries after Christ and that the author, whoever he was, simply chose to make Barnabas the alleged author of his obnoxious forgery. The men we referred to earlier, who have made much in-depth study into the origins and sources of the Gospel of Barnabas, have also tried to ascertain why the real author of this book chose to make Barnabas its supposed author. One or two plausible theories have been suggested, but to this day we have not been able to discover why he did this.

But one thing we do know - the actual author of the Gospel of Barnabas could not have made a worse choice for the "authorship" of his book than Barnabas. He has written this book ostensibly as a defence against "Pauline Christianity" (as some put it) and yet he has, probably without serious reflection, chosen as his author the one man we always find at the side of Paul - recommending him at all times as a true disciple of Jesus and endorsing his preaching wherever he went. To put it plainly, the author of the Gospel of Barnabas has chosen as the alleged author of the book he has composed against the teaching of Paul the very man who supported that teaching more actively than anyone else during his ministry. Barnabas was the spiritual blood-brother of Paul. Our real author has, in a second awful manner, made another calamitous blunder by suggesting that the Apostle Barnabas - of all people! - was the author of the fraudulent "Gospel" he has composed.

As we go further into the life of Barnabas this fact comes out even more clearly. When the church in Jerusalem heard that the church in Antioch was growing well, the apostles decided to send Barnabas there to take over the teaching and instruction of the new believers. But Barnabas, of his own volition, decided that he could not handle this by himself, and decided to obtain the assistance of another fellow-believer well-grounded in the faith for this work. Without hesitation Barnabas went all the way to Tarsus in Asia Minor to find Paul and immediately he brought him to Antioch to assist him in the instruction of the church in the city. We read the following of their ministry:

For a whole year they met with the church, and taught a large company of people; and in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians. Acts 11.26

Under the joint ministry of Paul and Barnabas, the disciples were first called Christians - because Barnabas was a true champion of the very "Pauline Christianity" that the Gospel of Barnabas sets out to refute. After this Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem with aid for the brethren because of a famine that was taking place in the days of the Roman emperor Claudius (Acts 11.28-30). After this Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch (Acts 12.25).

They continued to lead the church there and were subsequently sent out by the church to preach the Gospel in the provinces of Galatia (in what is part of Turkey as we know it today).

Wherever they went Paul and Barnabas preached that Jesus was the Son of God and that God had raised him from the dead (cf. Acts 13.33). And yet, the author of the Gospel of Barnabas would have us believe that Barnabas was an archenemy of Paul on these matters! We even find them both proclaiming that the restrictive ordinances of Judaism (e.g. circumcision) should not be forced upon the Gentiles and that they were unnecessary for salvation. A very interesting event in their joint ministry is recorded in these words:

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved'. And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. Acts 15.1-2

Certain Judaisers had come among the early Christians stating that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Who do we find debating hotly with them on this point? None other than Paul and Barnabas!

And yet, in the Gospel of Barnabas, we read that one of the "impious doctrines" that Paul was holding to was repudiation of circumcision. That he repudiated it as an essential element of salvation we will readily concede (Galatians 5. 2-6) - but his chief partner in this repudiation is none other than Barnabas! Once again the author has blundered in making Barnabas the author of his deplorable forgery.

Indeed, according to the Gospel of Barnabas, Jesus is alleged to have said to his disciples:

'Leave fear to him that hath not circumcised his foreskin, for he is deprived of paradise' (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.26).

Thus circumcision is an essential element and a prerequisite of salvation in the Gospel of Barnabas and the author obviously assents to this doctrine. But of the real Barnabas we read that he joined with Paul in furiously debating against the doctrine of the Judaisers that circumcision was necessary for salvation. It is quite clear that the real Barnabas was not the author of the book that bears his name and that someone else not only forged this book but misrepresented the name of its author as well.

The current publishers of the Gospel of Barnabas (Begum Aisha Bawany Wakf) are well aware that the major objective of the Gospel of Barnabas is to counteract "Pauline Christianity". In an appendix entitled "Life and Message of Barnabas" they allege that the passage about the debate on the issue of circumcision reveals a growing rift between Paul and Barnabas. They quote Acts 15.2 (quoted above) and shamelessly comment: "After this rift, there was a parting of the ways" between Paul and Barnabas (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.279). But it is quite obvious that the rift was not between Paul and Barnabas on the issue but between the men from Judea on the one hand who were glorifying circumcision and Paul and Barnabas on the other who were furiously against perverting the freedom of the religion of Jesus with legalistic traditions and restrictions that could save nobody. Because this appendix appears in all editions of the Gospel of Barnabas published today we must say that the whole article is a brazen misrepresentation of the true relationship between Paul and Barnabas. The writer of the article has had to disown conscience in trying to force the theory of the Gospel of Barnabas that Paul and Barnabas disagreed on doctrinal matters.

At no stage is there any evidence that Paul and Barnabas ever disagreed on a matter of doctrine. They once had a minor personal dispute when Paul did not wish to take John Mark on a missionary journey, as he had fallen back on a previous one, to the provinces of Galatia (Acts 15.38-40). This, however, was purely a personal matter which was clearly resolved as we see in other passages of Scripture (Colossians 4.10 and 2 Timothy 4.11). On one other occasion Barnabas was guilty of some religious discrimination with other Jewish Christians in Antioch when they would not eat with the Gentile Christians (Galatians 2.13). Paul censured this strongly but this was also not about a doctrinal matter but one of common fellowship between all Christians no matter what their background. None of these minor disputes had anything to do with the fundamental doctrines Paul and Barnabas so rigidly promoted - the repudiation of circumcision as necessary for salvation, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the basic doctrine that Jesus is the Son of God. Rather we have extensive evidence that Barnabas was the prime vindicator of all these doctrines that Paul taught.

Paul's later letter to the Christians of Galatia helps us even more to perceive the truth of this fact. In the second chapter we read that Paul went up to Jerusalem - with Barnabas of course - taking Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, with him as a test case against the necessity of circumcision (Galatians 2.1). But Titus, however, was not compelled to be circumcised - obviously as a result of the persuasive arguments of Paul and Barnabas against circumcision as an essential element of salvation.

Not only did the apostles at Jerusalem agree with Paul and Barnabas that circumcision was unnecessary but, as Paul said, they "gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2.9). Once again the sympathy and unity of Barnabas with Paul is plainly revealed and it is obvious that in the early church, whenever the Christians at Jerusalem thought of Barnabas, they must have immediately associated him with Paul.

In the third chapter of Galatians we have further evidence that Barnabas was a Christian in every way and not one who was opposed to Christianity as the author of the Gospel of Barnabas is. Paul, aggrieved that the Galatians were considering such a trivial matter as circumcision as essential for salvation, openly censured them for losing sight of the wondrous and all-sufficient work of Jesus who alone made salvation a reality for men through his atoning death on the cross. He rebuked them in the following words which show quite plainly what the heart of his message to them was:

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Galatians 3.1

We must ask: by whom was Jesus Christ "publicly portrayed as crucified" before the eyes of the Galatians? Who first preached to them the Gospel of Jesus? No one else but Paul and Barnabas! So from this letter we have further concrete evidence that Barnabas was a champion of the Gospel which Paul preached. Certainly he was not only an apostle of true Christian persuasion, but in his quest for Christian fellowship chose Paul as his closest companion. Of all people the Apostle Barnabas could not be the author of the Gospel attributed to him!

The transparent unity in the mission and purpose of Paul and Barnabas is finally made even yet clearer by this brief summary of their activities together:

"Devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue in the grace of God (Acts 13.43) ... Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly (13.46) ... the Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas (13.50) ... Paul went on with Barnabas to Derbe (14. 20) ... Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them (15.2) ... and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles (15.12) ... then it seemed good to the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas (15.22) ... our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ (15.26) ... Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord (15.35)"

There is such a contrast between the real Barnabas who through all these events chooses Paul as his companion, and the pseudo-author of the Gospel of Barnabas, who has a positive antagonism to Paul and his teaching, that we cannot help but conclude that the Gospel of Barnabas is a forgery. It was not written by Barnabas but by someone else who made a major tactical blunder in choosing a close companion of Paul as the author of this book.

Two points from within the Gospel of Barnabas also show that the author could not be the real Apostle Barnabas. Firstly, this book makes Jesus constantly deny that he is the Messiah (further treatment of this subject follows later in this booklet) and yet the same book calls Jesus himself the "Christ" (p.2). Now any man with a basic knowledge of Greek knows that "Christos" is the Greek translation of Messiah (a Hebrew word) and that "Jesus Christ" is an anglicised form of the Greek "Iesous Christos", meaning "Jesus the Messiah". The very real contradiction that exists here in the Gospel of Barnabas is further evidence that the author was not Barnabas himself. He came from Cyprus, an island where Greek was the common tongue, and Greek would have been his home language. The real Barnabas would never have made such a mistake as to call Jesus the Christ and deny that he was the Messiah!

Secondly, the author of the Gospel of Barnabas has chosen to know nothing of the ministry of John the Baptist in his book but has deviously taken the testimony of John to Jesus in the Bible and changed it into a supposed testimony of Jesus to Muhammad. Whether Jesus ever predicted the coming of Muhammad or not is not at issue here (see *Is Muhammad Foretold in the Bible?*, No.5 in this series, for a treatment of that subject). What is obvious, however, to anyone who has read the life of Jesus in the Bible, is that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas has tried to make Jesus a herald of the coming of Muhammad in the very mould of John the Baptist who was a herald of the coming of Jesus, and to achieve this he has put Jesus in the shoes of John and has made him say of Muhammad what John really said of him!

Accordingly the author of the Gospel of Barnabas has had to omit the person and ministry of John from his book altogether. But the clear and consistent account of John's ministry in the Bible (see particularly Matthew chapter 3, John chapters 1 and 3) and the plain endorsement in the Qur'an of the ministry of John the Baptist as a herald of Jesus (Surah 3.39) both expose the deceitfulness of the author of the Gospel of Barnabas. It is certain that the real Barnabas, who was a "good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith" (Acts 11.24), would never have resorted to such falsehood in the cause of truth to which he was so dedicated throughout his life.

We conclude that there is overwhelming evidence that the real Barnabas was most certainly not the author of the book being circulated today in the Muslim world which purports to be written by him. But now let us press on to a brief examination of the internal evidence of the Gospel of Barnabas to see whether it has any credibility at all, or whether it is not really a "bare-faced forgery", as George Sale put it, that has been unwittingly distributed throughout the Islamic world in the service of Satan and his causes alone.

2. Evidence of its Medieval Origin

We find much evidence in the Gospel of Barnabas that it was first written in the Middle Ages - many centuries after the times of Jesus and Muhammad.

a). The Centenary Jubilee.

In the time of Moses God ordained that the Jews were to observe a jubilee year twice a century:

A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you. Leviticus 25.11

Throughout the centuries this command was observed and the Roman Catholic Church eventually took it over into the Christian faith. About 1300 AD Pope Boniface the Eighth gave a decree that the jubilee should be observed once every hundred years. This is the only occasion in all history that the jubilee year was made to be only once every hundred years. After the death of Boniface, however, Pope Clemens the Sixth decreed in 1343 AD that the jubilee year should revert to once every fifty years as it was observed by the Jews after the time of Moses. Now we find in the Gospel of Barnabas that Jesus is alleged to have said:

'And then through all the world will God be worshipped, and mercy received, insomuch that the year of jubilee, which now cometh every hundred years, shall by the Messiah be reduced to every year in every place.' (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.104).

Only one solution can account for this remarkable coincidence. The author of the Gospel of Barnabas could only have quoted Jesus as speaking of the year of jubilee as coming "every hundred years" if he knew of the decree of Pope Boniface. But how could he know of this decree unless he lived at the same time as the Pope or sometime afterwards? This is a clear anachronism which compels us to conclude that the Gospel of Barnabas could not have been written earlier than the fourteenth century AD.

This also means that the Gospel of Barnabas dates at least seven hundred years after the time of Muhammad and it is in the circumstances of no historical value at all. Although it often makes Jesus predict the coming of Muhammad by name (which is why it is a best-seller in the world of Islam today), as it was written after the death of Muhammad, these "prophecies" are of no interest or value at all. Indeed the Gospel of Barnabas

contains many discourses and practices fully synonymous with the basic teachings of Islam - but these too are of no value because the book was written at least seven hundred years after the advent of Islam.

Prophecies that are first composed centuries after the event they foretell has come to pass are of no more interest or value than yesterday's weather forecast. We conclude, from the striking quote about the jubilee year, that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas wrote his book not earlier than the fourteenth century after Christ. Let us press on to examine further evidence of mediaeval features.

b). Quotations from Dante.

Dante was an Italian who, significantly, also lived about the time of Pope Boniface and wrote his famous "Divina Comedia" in the fourteenth century. This was basically a fantasy about hell, purgatory and paradise according to the Roman Catholic beliefs of his times.

Now in the Gospel of Barnabas we read that Jesus allegedly said of the prophets of old:

'Readily and with gladness they went to their death, so as not to offend against the law of God given by Moses his servant, and go and serve false and lying gods'. (Gospel of Barnabas, p.27).

The expression "false and lying gods" (*dei falsi e lugiardi*) is found elsewhere in the Gospel of Barnabas as well. On one occasion it is Jesus again who supposedly uses these words (p.99) and on another it is the author himself who describes Herod as serving "false and lying gods" (p.267). Nevertheless this expression is found in neither the Bible nor the Qur'an. What is interesting, however, is that it is a direct quote from Dante! (*Inferno* 1.72). Many of the descriptions of hell in the Gospel of Barnabas (pp. 76-77) are reminiscent of those in the third canto of Dante's *Inferno* as well.

Likewise the expression "raging hunger" (*rabbiosa fame*) is also reminiscent of the first canto of Dante's *Inferno*. Both speak of the "circles of hell" and the author of the Gospel of Barnabas also makes Jesus say to Peter:

'Know ye therefore that hell is one, yet hath seven centres one below another. Hence, even as sin is of seven kinds, for as seven gates of hell hath Satan generated it: so there are seven punishments therein'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.171).

This is precisely Dante's description found in the fifth and sixth cantos of his *Inferno*. We could go on and quote many more examples but space here demands that we press on to other evidences that the Gospel of Barnabas was written in the Middle Ages. One striking quote must be mentioned, however, because in this case the Gospel of Barnabas agrees with Dante while contradicting the Qur'an. We read in the Qur'an that there are seven heavens:

He it is who created for you all that is in the earth. Then turned He to the heaven, and fashioned it as seven heavens. Surah 2.29

On the contrary we read in the Gospel of Barnabas that there are nine heavens and that Paradise like Dante's *Empyrean* - is the tenth heaven above all the other nine. The author of the Gospel of Barnabas makes Jesus say:

'Paradise is so great that no man can measure it. Verily I say unto thee that the heavens are nine ... I say to thee that paradise is greater than all the earth and all the heavens together'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.223).

Clearly the author of the Gospel of Barnabas knew Dante's work and had no scruples to quote from it. Accordingly we have further evidence that the Gospel of Barnabas could not have been written earlier than the fourteenth century - hundreds of years after the times of Jesus and Muhammad. It is accordingly a worthless forgery which should be disowned as such by every Muslim who believes in his heart that no lie can be of the truth.

c). The Mediaeval Environment of the Gospel.

The author of the Gospel of Barnabas claims to have been with Jesus throughout his ministry and accordingly must have walked with him throughout the land of Palestine during those three years that Jesus served the people of Israel. In the circumstances we would expect to find a first-century, Palestinian environment in his book -

such as we find in the four true Gospels of the Christian Bible. But we are astonished to find many incidents which betray a mediaeval, western-European background in the Gospel of Barnabas. Firstly we read:

'Behold then how beautiful is the world in summer-time, when all things bear fruit. The very peasant, intoxicated with gladness by reason of the harvest that is come, maketh the valleys and mountains resound with his singing, for that he loveth his labours supremely'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.217).

This is a fair description of Spain or Italy in summer but most certainly not of Palestine where the rain falls in winter and where the fields are parched in summer. In any event Palestine has always been a part of the world where cultivation of the land has required much effort and where much of the countryside is barren and grassless. We find it surprising that this land should be appealed to as one which in summer-time is a good example of the delightful environment of Paradise. Indeed Jesus is alleged to have delivered this discourse to his disciples in the wilderness beyond the Jordan (p.211) where they were hardly likely to have any evidence of the glories of the lush gardens of Paradise.

Again we read in the Gospel of Barnabas that Martha, her sister Mary, and her brother Lazarus were the overlords of two towns, Magdala and Bethany (p.242). This proprietorship of villages and towns belongs to the Middle Ages when the system of feudalism was rooted in European society. Certainly no such practice was known at the time of Jesus when the occupying Roman forces controlled most of the land of Palestine.

These anachronisms rule out any possibility that the Gospel of Barnabas is genuinely what it claims to be. It does well appear to be a forgery of the Middle Ages written by a Muslim who, probably frustrated at being unable to prove that the true Gospels in the Bible are corrupted, wrote a false Gospel and proclaimed that his corruption was the truth! A similar example of the mediaeval environment of this Gospel is the reference in it to wine casks (p.196), for wine was stored in skins in Palestine (Matthew 9.17) while wooden casks were used in Europe in the Middle Ages.

In conclusion, however, it must be pointed out that whereas the author of the Gospel of Barnabas reveals in his book that he has an accurate knowledge of the structure of mediaeval society, he simultaneously exposes his ignorance of the land of Palestine which he is supposed to have traversed as a disciple of Jesus for at least three years! He says:

Having arrived at the city of Nazareth the sea-men spread through the city all that Jesus had wrought. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.23).

In this passage Nazareth is represented as a coastal city, a harbour on the lake of Galilee. After this we read that Jesus "went up to Capernaum" (p.23) from Nazareth, as though Capernaum was in the hillside near the sea of Galilee. Here the author really has his facts incorrect, for Capernaum was the coastal city and Nazareth was up in the hills (where it is to this day). Jesus would have gone up from Capernaum to Nazareth, not the other way around as the author of the Gospel of Barnabas has it. This evidence also shows that the author of the Gospel of Barnabas lived in Europe in the Middle Ages rather than in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

3. Other Evidences against its Authenticity

Before concluding this booklet let us briefly consider some of the other evidences that prove that the Gospel of Barnabas is a forgery. Firstly, this book makes Jesus often state that he is not the Messiah but that Muhammad would be the Messiah. It is a constant, recurring theme in the Gospel of Barnabas. Two quotes show, not only that Jesus did not consider himself the Messiah, but preached that Muhammad was to be the Messiah:

Jesus confessed and said the truth: 'I am not the Messiah ... I am indeed sent to the house of Israel as a prophet of salvation; but after me shall come the Messiah'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, pp.54, 104).

Other passages in the Gospel of Barnabas contain similar denials by Jesus that he was the Messiah. It is clearly one of the express purposes of this book to establish Muhammad as the Messiah and to subject Jesus to him in dignity and authority. Here, however, the author of this book has overreached himself in his zeal for the cause of Islam. For the Qur'an plainly admits that Jesus is the Messiah on numerous occasions and in doing so it confirms

the teaching of Jesus himself that he was indeed the Messiah (John 4.26, Matthew 16.20). One quote from the Qur'an will suffice to prove this:

'O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter'. Surah 3.45

The Gospel of Barnabas was obviously written as an ideal "Islamic" Gospel, setting forth a life of Christ in which he is made to be the Isa of the Qur'an rather than the Lord Jesus Christ of the Christian Gospels. But as it so hopelessly contradicts both the Qur'an and the Bible on the fact that Jesus was the Messiah and does this so often and so consistently, it must be rejected as a forgery by Christian and Muslim alike. There is no room here for apologetics or efforts to reconcile this book with the Qur'an or the Bible. It is a counterfeit.

Secondly, it is alleged that the Romans stirred up the Jews to such an extent about the real nature of Jesus that "all Judea was in arms" (p.115), ready to fight for or against the various beliefs being spread among them about him. As a result six hundred thousand gathered for battle - two hundred thousand each for the beliefs that he was God, that he was the Son of God, and that he was only a prophet; all of them being prepared for a three-cornered contest where each side took on the other two at one and the same time!

The story betrays itself as a phenomenal myth and fantasy by its hopeless overstatement of the number of men gathered for battle. (The author often resorts to wild exaggerations of facts and numbers in his book in an apparent attempt to create a wondrous impact on his readers). Where did the Jews suddenly find six hundred thousand swords at a time when the Romans not only suppressed but also prevented the manufacture of military hardware by this nation? Rather than fight one another, this whole army could with ease have driven the Romans right out of Palestine for the Roman army throughout the world numbered less than half this figure. Only a small garrison controlled Judea and secular history knows of no such monumental preparation for a three-cornered contest of such gigantic proportions!

The Gospel of Barnabas furthermore suggests that Pilate, Herod and Caiaphas went to great pains to prevent the pending holocaust. We find this hard to believe. If indeed the Jews were six hundred thousand strong, Pilate would have been only too delighted to see them decimate one another in a three-cornered contest!

The Gospel of Barnabas also clearly contradicts the Qur'an about the birth of Jesus when it says:

The virgin was surrounded by a light exceeding bright and brought forth her son without pain. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.5).

This is a clear repetition of Roman Catholic beliefs of the Middle Ages. The bright light and the painless birth find parallels in the beliefs about the Virgin Mary in the churches of Europe in Mediaeval times. No such details are found in the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus but the Qur'an directly contradicts the Gospel of Barnabas when it says:

And the pangs of childbirth drove her unto the trunk of the palm tree. Surah 19.23

Because the Gospel of Barnabas purports to be an account of the life of Jesus written by one of his disciples, and further because it has been clearly composed to synchronise with the Qur'an in its concept of Jesus as a prophet of Islam, the Muslim world has not hesitated to foist this book on the Christian world as the "true Gospel". But we are constrained to ask how this book can be true in Muslim eyes if it contradicts the Qur'an which the Muslims believe to be the Word of God.

In the Gospel of Barnabas we read that Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea both at the time of the birth of Jesus (p.4) and during the time of his ministry thirty years later. Palestine was a particularly difficult trouble-spot for the Romans and no governor was sent there for long - let alone thirty years. We know from history in any event that Pilate was only appointed governor in 27 AD - more than a generation after the birth of Jesus. This is another faux pas - one of many in the pages of this Gospel.

Another contradiction between the Gospel of Barnabas and the Qur'an is found in their respective accounts of the end times. According to the Gospel of Barnabas, on the thirteenth day of a fifteen day climax leading to the end

of all things, "the heaven shall be rolled up like a book, and it shall rain fire, so that every living thing shall die" (p.70). The Qur'an, however, says of the Last Day:

But when the shout cometh on the day when a man fleeth from his brother and his mother and his father and his wife and his children, every man will have that day concern enough to make him heedless of others. Surah 80.33-37

There is a clear contradiction here. The Gospel of Barnabas states that two days before the end all shall perish but the Qur'an states that men will still be alive until the last day when the trumpet shall sound from heaven. The Muslim world must choose between the Qur'an and the Gospel of Barnabas - no man can sincerely believe that the latter book is a true account of the life of Jesus Christ if he still believes that the Qur'an is the Word of God.

Furthermore according to the Gospel of Barnabas all angels shall die on the last day (p.70) but the Qur'an knows nothing of the death of angels but states that eight of them will bear the Lord's throne on the last day (Surah 69.17). Any Muslim who believes that the Qur'an is the Word of God and any Christian who believes that the Bible is the Word of God must reject the Gospel of Barnabas as a hybrid composition of no literary or religious value at all.

We could go on and produce even further proofs that this book is truly a "bare-faced forgery" as George Sale so succinctly put it but the evidence given in this booklet should be sufficient to convince any reasonable Muslim that, while he might feel it would be very useful for a Gospel to be discovered wherein Jesus foretells the coming of Muhammad, the Gospel of Barnabas just does not provide him with the honest evidence he needs. Muslim interest in this book is understandable but, in the name of truth and honesty, the Muslims of the world should admit that it is not a book contemporary with the life of Jesus, which proves that he really was the Isa of the Qur'an, but rather a lamentable forgery which, far from promoting the cause of Islam, must ultimately damage it if foolish men continue to propagate it as a true account of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. We shall conclude with a brief study of the likely origin and author of the Gospel of Barnabas from the evidence we possess at the present time.

4. Who Really Composed this Forgery?

There are only two known manuscripts of the Gospel of Barnabas which existed before any copies were made from the texts available to us. The Italian version is in a library today in Vienna whereas only fragments remain of the Spanish version. George Sale, in his comments on the Gospel of Barnabas in his "Preliminary Discourse to the Koran" and a further short preface in his book, speaks of a complete Spanish version in his lifetime which he saw for himself. It appears that the Spanish version may well have been the original one. In the introduction to this version it is claimed that it is a translation of the Italian version but numerous spelling errors in the Italian version - typical of an author using Italian as a second language - certainly show at least that the author was more at home in Spain than Italy. Nevertheless this does not prevent the possibility that someone from Spain tried his hand at composing an original in Italian. This possibility is made all the more real by two considerations.

Firstly, as the author often quotes the Vulgate (the Latin translation of the Bible) and has borrowed many of his stories from the Scriptures, he might well have found it more convenient to use the Italian language medium for his own contrived composition.

Secondly, he might have thought that his book would look far more authentic if it was written in Italian. It would serve to substantiate the introduction of the Spanish version where it was alleged that the Gospel of Barnabas was originally hidden in the Pope's library before it was discovered in rather questionable circumstances by a certain Fra Marine who allegedly became a Muslim after reading it. The Italian text may have been written to give some credence to this story - if the Gospel was to appear in Spain first of all, it would be far more suitable to have it written in the foreign tongue in the land of its alleged origin, rather than in the local dialect. This latter alternative might have cast immediate suspicion on its real origin - especially if an Italian version could not be produced to verify the claim that the original came from Italy.

Certain features, however, substantiate the suggestion that this book was first written in Spain by a Spaniard, no matter what language he originally wrote it in. The Gospel of Barnabas makes Jesus say:

'For he who would get in change a piece of gold must have sixty mites'. (The Gospel of Barnabas, p.71).

The Italian version divides the golden "denarius" into sixty "minuti". These coins were actually of Spanish origin during the pre-Islamic Visigothic period and openly betray a Spanish background to the original Gospel of Barnabas.

No one knows who actually wrote the Gospel of Barnabas but what is known, without shadow of doubt, is that whoever it was, it most certainly was not the Apostle Barnabas. It was most probably a Muslim in Spain who, possibly the victim of the reconquest of his country, decided to take private revenge by composing a false Gospel under the assumed name of Barnabas to give his obnoxious forgery some measure of apparent authenticity. He probably first composed the Italian script to maintain this appearance of genuineness but simultaneously composed (or arranged for such a translation) a Spanish version for distribution in his own country. He may well have been the notorious Fra Marine or he may have been the translator Mustafa de Aranda, or indeed he may well have been both - using the two names for the same expedient ends as those he sought to achieve through using the name of Barnabas as the author of his book. He most certainly was someone far more at home in Spain in the Middle Ages rather than in Palestine at the time of Jesus Christ.

Whatever the Gospel of Barnabas may claim to be, whatever it may appear to be, whatever the Muslim world would like it to be, a general study of its contents and authorship shows that it is a poor attempt to forge a life of Jesus consonant with the profile of Jesus in the Qur'an and Islamic tradition. The Muslim world will do well to reject this book as a clear forgery - for that is what it unmistakably proves to be.

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An Analytical Study of the Cross and the Hijrah

by John Gilchrist

1. The Similarities between Jerusalem and Mecca
2. The Opposition to Jesus and Muhammad
3. The Ways of Escape Before both Men
4. Muhammad and the Ummah at Medina
5. The Contrasting Path Chosen by Jesus Christ
6. The Cross - the Choice of the Saviour of the World
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An Analytical Study of the Cross and the Hijrah

It is not often realised how many similarities there are between the ministries of Jesus and Muhammad up to the point of Muhammad's departure from Mecca for the city of Medina (then known as Yathrib). The Islamic calendar traditionally dates from this exodus which is described in Islamic history as the *hijrah* (the "emigration"). In the biographies of the founders of the two greatest religions in the world we find them both pursuing a religious purpose and vocation that was to provoke intense opposition from their respective countrymen to the point where plans were laid to put them both to death. Each one was to learn of the plot against him and a moment of crisis, of crucial decision-making, was to face him.

In this booklet we shall briefly analyse the similarities between the events in the lives of these two men that led to the point of crisis, examine the actual decisions taken by them, and the vastly different courses their lives and ministries were to take as a result.

1. The Similarities Between Jerusalem and Mecca

During the lifetime of Jesus the city of Jerusalem was the centre of Judaism, the religion of the people of Israel, the Jews, to whom Jesus himself belonged. He had been born of David's line (Luke 1:32) and was thus descended from Judah (Hebrews 7:14), one of the twelve sons of the prophet Jacob.

Nearly six centuries later Muhammad was born in the city of Mecca, the leading city of the Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula and the custodian of its most important shrine and relics. The Quraysh tribe controlled the city and its religious ceremonies and Muhammad was duly born into this tribe in 570 AD. Both Jesus and Muhammad, therefore, were members of the very nations that ruled their major cities respectively and were brought up in the environment of their forefathers and their religious customs. Just as Jerusalem was the centre of Judaism at the time of Jesus, so Mecca was the focal-point of Arab paganism during the lifetime of Muhammad.

Each city, furthermore, had its own special place of worship, a shrine that was the focal-point of all the religious ceremonies practised by the Jews and Arabs respectively. In Jerusalem the great Temple of the Jews stood at the time of Jesus. It had originally been built by Solomon nearly a thousand years earlier, had been rebuilt during the reign of Zerubbabel after the exile to Babylon a few centuries later, and by the time Jesus began his ministry it had gone through a radical phase of reconstruction that had already taken forty-six years (John 2:20) and became known as "Herod's Temple" when it was finally completed.

This temple had a number of courtyards and porticoes but its chief building was a cube-like structure in the middle of the Jewish courtyard known as the "Holy Place" which contained the Holy of Holies, an inner sanctuary where the presence of God was known to be and into which only the High Priest could go on the Day of Atonement to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people of Israel.

Wherever the Jews were in the known world of the time, whether in Africa, Asia Minor, Greece or Rome, they would turn towards the Temple in Jerusalem to pray, signifying their rejection of the pagan rites and customs of the Gentile nations and their identification with the God of Israel, the one true God. This practice had been enjoined by Solomon (Suleiman) himself when he completed the first temple in Jerusalem. He prayed to God at the dedication of the temple in these words:

"And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling- place; and when thou hearest, forgive". -- 1 Kings 8:30

In Mecca the pagan Arabs had a similar shrine which today likewise has porticoes and an inner courtyard. Like the Holy Place in Jerusalem it too contained a cube-like structure known as the "Ka'aba" (the word in Arabic in fact signifies a cube) and to this day it is known in Islam as the holiest shrine in all the world. As the Temple in Jerusalem has been called *bait ul-muqaddas* in Islam (the "Holy House"), so the Ka'aba has been called *baitullah* (the "House of Allah"). Although Muhammad never believed that Allah himself manifested his presence in the shrine, it has nonetheless become the point of identification with Allah on earth for all Muslims and, like the Jews of old, they too all turn towards their holy house when offering their prayers to God. Every mosque in the world faces Mecca so that all Muslims will be facing the Ka'aba when they pray.

The similarity between the shrines goes still further. Not only did the Jews face Jerusalem when praying but they also came to the city from all over the known world for the various Jewish festivals held every year. Many made the journey to the city for the Passover Feast, the Festival of Booths, and other festivals. On the Day of Pentecost that followed the ascension of Jesus to heaven we read that the Jews were astounded to hear the disciples of Jesus preaching fluently in their own languages and in their exclamation of amazement we obtain some idea of the distant lands from which they had come. Thousands were gathered together and as this multitude of worshippers stood bewildered at the manner in which the apostles addressed them they said:

"Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God". - Acts 2:7-11.

In a similar way Arabs came from all over Arabia in the holy months to worship at the Ka'aba during the time of Muhammad. The Festival of Ukadh was their major fair but many others were held every year to which Arabs from the Najran province, the Hijaz mountain areas north of Mecca, the state of Yemen to the south, and various other cities and provinces flocked.

Both the Temple and the Ka'aba were thus the focal-points of Judaism and Arab paganism respectively to which the Jews and Arabs turned in prayer and flocked in pilgrimage to perform their devotions. Into these two similar environments Jesus and Muhammad were born, and within the precincts of their holy cities Jerusalem and Mecca they preached in the name of God to their country-men, both making special use of the annual festivals to deliver their messages to the representatives of their nations gathered together.

2. The Opposition to Jesus and Muhammad

Jesus and Muhammad both rose from among their own people and came into prominence as they began to preach in their holy cities. It took only a short while, however, before each was strongly opposed and persecuted by the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Mecca respectively. They both acknowledged the sanctity of the holy shrines in their cities but stood firmly against the practices and ceremonies being conducted around them. Jesus recognised that the Temple was the sacred house of the God of Israel and constantly referred to it as "my Father's house" (Luke 2:49, John 2:16). So likewise Muhammad acknowledged that Allah was the "Lord of the Ka'aba" and the Qur'an teaches that it was originally built by Abraham through a direct command of Allah in these words:

We covenanted with Abraham and Ismail, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). -- Surah 2:125

Jesus stood against the Temple worship, not because he did not accept that it was the true Holy Place of God on earth, but because the religion of the Jews, in particular the rites being practised around the Temple, had become a gross perversion of what God had intended it to be. The Jewish leaders had forsaken the commandments of God for the sake of their own tradition (Matthew 15:6).

Shortly after his baptism and at the very beginning of his public ministry Jesus entered the Temple and made a public remonstrance against the religious orders of the day. The incident is recorded as follows:

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the moneychangers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade". -- John 2:13-16.

This act immediately set the Jews of Jerusalem against him and when he repeated it during the last week of his ministry, the chief priests and scribes and principal men of the Jews took counsel against him to put him to death (Luke 19:47). Jesus, on this latter occasion, condemned the whole Jewish system around God's House in these words:

"It is written, 'My house shall be a house of prayer'; but you have made it a den of robbers". -- Luke 19:46

Muhammad stood against the rites around the Ka'aba because the shrine was polluted with idols. It is said there were more than three hundred in and around the shrine. At the age of thirty-five, some five years before the commencement of his public preaching, he was selected to replace the black stone in the Ka'aba as it was being rebuilt. He willingly consented and throughout his life regarded the Ka'aba as a sacred shrine built originally for the honour of Allah alone.

His early teachings, however, struck right at the root of the pagan idolatry surrounding the building. He constantly declared that God was One, that he had no partners, and that any association of any creature with him was an unforgivable sin (Surah 4:116). He thus condemned out of hand the whole of the Ka'aba worship as idolatrous and whereas, like Jesus at the Temple, he did not disdain to worship at the Ka'aba, he nevertheless opposed the idol-worship associated with the shrine.

In both cases the cities rose in defiance of these men who promised nothing less than the supreme punishment to their most distinguished inhabitants. Jesus plainly said to the Jewish leaders, "How are you to escape being sentenced to hell?" (Matthew 23:33), and Muhammad likewise warned the Arabs against the Day of Judgment when they would be dragged through the Fire, being commanded, "Taste ye the touch of Hell!" (Surah 54:48). Each came to a point of crisis and decision. When Muhammad made a covenant with certain men from Yathrib (Medina), it was discovered by the Quraysh and they finally determined to put him to death. A three-year trade ban on the sub-tribe of Banu Hashim to which Muhammad belonged had failed to negate his influence and the Meccan Arabs decided on the ultimate method of silencing him. Muhammad's life was no longer safe in Mecca - the point of decision had come. The Qur'an itself mentions the plot laid by the unbelieving Arabs to kill Muhammad:

Remember how the Unbelievers plotted against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home). They plot and plan, and God too plans, but the best of planners is God. -- Surah 8:30

Muhammad had to take a quick decision in this moment of crisis. He had to act one way or the other in the face of the, by now, extreme threat from the idolatrous Arabs of Mecca.

Jesus reached a similar point where he too had to make a sudden decision in the face of a growing scheme to destroy him. When he raised Lazarus from the dead the chief priests among the Jews at Jerusalem, concerned at his growing influence, finally turned their desire to do away with him into a deliberate plot to kill him:

So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death. -- John 11:53

Like Muhammad he was faced with a moment of destiny. Should he remain in Jerusalem and endanger his life, or should he move away from the city?

3. The Ways of Escape Before Both Men

Just as opposition against Muhammad was coming to a head in Mecca, and not long after he had been rejected by the people at at-Ta'if to the south-east of the city, a welcome opportunity to escape the pending dangers and find an alternative haven came his way. The two major tribes in Yathrib, the Aus and the Khazraj, had for a long time fought with one another and, in an attempt to resolve their differences, they sought an independent leader. Men from both tribes made a pact with Muhammad during one of the fairs at Mecca and a year later a group of seventy returned and, at the Second Pledge of Aqabah, committed themselves to Muhammad, pledging to defend him even at the cost of their lives.

Not long afterward Muhammad left Mecca for Yathrib with a few score followers, later known as the *muhajirun* (the "emigrants"), and was duly met by each of the *ansar* (the "helpers") who had covenanted with him at Aqabah. Muhammad made the city his home and headquarters, renamed it *al-Madinah* ("the city"), and set about establishing himself among the people to the north of Mecca who had offered him a suitable haven of refuge and a way of escape from the growing dangers he had faced. The great *Hijrah*, the Emigration, was complete.

The parallels between the crises that both Jesus and Muhammad met continue at this point as well. As soon as Jesus knew that the chief priests were planning to put him to death, he no longer went about openly among the Jews until the Feast of the Passover when he returned again to Jerusalem (John 11:54: 12:1). He came into the city seated on a donkey, fully aware of the schemes being laid against him. He had been rejected and despised by the priestly hierarchy in Jerusalem and knew that he faced all sorts of dangers from the Jews in the city. Suddenly a way of escape opened to him, uncannily similar to the one presented to Muhammad. Shortly after he had entered the city a delegation of Greeks came to Philip, one of Jesus' disciples, and they said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Philip and Andrew duly went and told Jesus.

Jesus must have felt the same sense of potential relief that Muhammad was later to feel in similar circumstances. He could go away from the Jews and make his home among the Greeks - a possibility considered sometime earlier by the Jews themselves in Jerusalem (John 7:35). At his moment of destiny and crisis Jesus too discovered an inviting prospect of escape. Thus far the analogy between him and Muhammad goes, but no further. When he heard that the Greeks wanted to see him he replied to his disciples:

"The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit". -- John 12:23-24.

He had come into the world with an express purpose and he knew that his hour of destiny had arrived. The hour had come for him to fulfil his glorious mission and as he considered the request of the Greeks, he told a brief parable to illustrate his reason for rejecting the opportunity to escape. If a grain of wheat is left by itself on a shelf it will retain its own identity but will serve no purpose. If it is buried in the ground, it will lose its identity, but the plant that will grow from it will bear many new grains of wheat.

Jesus came into the world to save it. He came to give his life as a supreme sacrifice that would give life and a new hope to the world (John 6:51). His purpose was to make the kingdom of heaven available to sinful, dying

men. To achieve this he knew that he himself must die and be buried and that it would only be through this atoning work that the kingdom of heaven could truly be established on earth and many men become its heirs through faith in him.

The seed had to lose its identity and first be buried before it could bear much fruit. Jesus first had to suffer and die for the sins of men before his salvation could become available to Jews and Greeks and all the other nations of the world. He considered the way of escape offered to him but rejected it in these words:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour". -- John 12:27

Should he appeal to his Father to save him from his moment of destiny by finding a refuge among the Greeks? No - he rejected the idea. He had come for this hour. He solemnly turned down the opportunity to escape that Muhammad gratefully accepted. He set his face towards the cross that he knew was facing him and the work of salvation that he was to accomplish on it. Instead of appealing for help he boldly declared, "Father, glorify thy Name", and a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it and I will glorify it again" (John 12:28).

The similarities between the course of events in the lives of Jesus and Muhammad come to an end at this point and from here on all is in contrast. Muhammad took a pledge from the Ansar to defend and save his life, even to the point of sacrificing their own lives. Jesus renewed his own pledge to lay down his life so that all his followers might find life instead. These contrary decisions in the moment of crisis and destiny were to lead these two men on totally different paths thereafter and their missions were to have sharply contrasting consequences.

4. Muhammad and the Ummah at Medina

For many years scholars tended to distinguish between Muhammad as a lonely preacher in Mecca and Muhammad as the head of a community of believers at Medina dedicated to defeating their opponents in Arabia through *jihad*, religious warfare. It has often been suggested that Muhammad's personality and objectives changed at Medina and that the militant figurehead of a large body of believers in this city compared sharply with the passive preacher at Mecca who patiently endured all the insults heaped on him and the persecutions levelled against his followers.

In more recent years, however, scholars have concluded that there was really no change in the man at all and that the rule he established in Medina and the means it he adopted to enforce and spread its influence had been forming in his mind long before he left Mecca. It is now suggested that the prophet of the Arabs at Mecca was seeking favourable circumstances to employ his ultimate objectives and that the Hijrah was not simply an escape from Mecca but a deliberate stepping-stone towards the establishment of the circumstances Muhammad perceived necessary to bring about the religious order he believed he was called to establish.

A brief study of the teaching of the Qur'an at this point tends to confirm this latter view. The book plainly teaches that it was God's express will to create a well-balanced and stable *ummah*, a "community" of believers, to be a witness to the nations (Surah 2:143). Furthermore, whereas *jihad* only became a tenet and regular feature of Islam at Medina in contrast with the situation at Mecca where no Muslim was taught to retaliate against the enemies of Islam, the Qur'an nevertheless places the Hijrah and jihad side by side, indicating that one of the purposes of the escape from Mecca was to establish a better base from which the struggle of jihad against the unbelievers could be launched.

Not long after the Hijrah a party of Muslims made an attack on a small Meccan caravan at Nakhlah near Mecca in which one of the pagan Arabs was killed and two were captured. The Muslims at Medina were surprised at this new venture and were also quite disturbed to find themselves on the offensive against the Meccans. Although they had been the victims of prolonged persecution during Muhammad's preaching years at Mecca, it was not the policy of the Quraysh to put them to death. Now, very shortly after the Hijrah, one of their opponents had been slain by fellow-Muslims and the fledgling community at Medina questioned the wisdom of provoking possible large-scale retaliation from Mecca and the whole prospect of fighting in the way of religion. The following verse in the Qur'an, however, soon came to Muhammad to reassure them:

Fighting is prescribed for you. -- Surah 2:216

The very next verse justified retaliation against the Meccans for denying the Muslims access to the Ka'aba and for the constant oppression heaped upon them and the following verse reads:

Those who believed and those who suffered exile and fought (and strove and struggled) in the path of God, - they have the hope of the mercy of God; and God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. -- Surah 2:218

In the original Arabic the words translated "and those who suffered exile and fought in the path of God" read as follows: *wallathiina haajaruu wa jaahaduu fii sabiilillah*. It is very significant to see the concept of exile, *hijrah*, directly linked with that of fighting, namely *jihad*. Those who have been "exiled" (*haajaruu*) are also those who have "fought" (*jaahaduu*) in the way of Allah. The Hijrah was thus merely a stepping-stone towards jihad. It was not only an opportunity to escape for Muhammad but also a means to deal more effectively with those who opposed him. It was the pathway to jihad. Muhammad left Mecca only to take steps immediately to interrupt its trade and ultimately to conquer and subdue it. He escaped from the city that had rejected him only to confront it from Medina.

The growing Muslim *ummah* at Medina at last found itself able to deal forcefully with those who opposed it. Even though there were hostile elements in the city, both Jewish and Arab, Muhammad gradually asserted his authority. He exiled two of the Jewish tribes and despatched the third after his final confrontation with the Meccans at Medina and although he never fully subdued the Aarabs in the city who were opposed to him, he did eventually annul their influence completely. Even during the period when they sought to undermine his influence they did outwardly swear allegiance to him.

The three confrontations with the Meccans before Muhammad was finally able to conquer Mecca with a superior force in 630 AD all helped the *ummah* to establish itself. Though outnumbered at Badr in 625 AD the Muslims inflicted a serious defeat on the Meccans, killing a number of their leaders including Abu Jahl who had been one of Muhammad's chief opponents.

The Muslims suffered a reverse at the Battle of Uhud which followed but their security within Medina was unchallenged and when a major effort by the Meccans to drive them out a year later also failed, the ever-growing Muslim community was able to take the offensive and conquer the Meccans.

Many Muslim writers have sought to justify jihad in Islam by suggesting that this applies purely to self-defence and they argue accordingly that all Muhammad's wars including those of his successors (in particular the battles fought during Umar's caliphate which spread the rule of Islam to Egypt, Syria, Iraq and parts of Iran) were purely defensive. We are not concerned to debate this subject here and only wish to note that it is at least admitted that the sword may be unsheathed for the protection of Muslim communities and the faith of Islam.

Muhammad himself saw nothing wrong with the destruction of his enemies by force of arms and the Qur'an itself calls for the demise of his uncle and radical opponent Abu Lahab (Surah 111:1). Muslims themselves were told that every Muslim who died while fighting for Islam was a *shahid*, a martyr (the word principally means a "witness"), and the Qur'an duly guarantees Paradise to them. A typical passage setting out the benefits of dying while fighting for the faith is this one:

Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, - on them will God bestow verily a goodly Provision: Truly God is He Who bestows the best Provision. Verily he will admit them to a place with which they shall be well-pleased: for God is All-Knowing, Most Forbearing. -- Surah 22:58-59.

Significantly the first verse speaks once again of the *haajaruu*, those who go into exile, and who are then killed (*qutiluu*) in the way of Allah. The Hijrah thus led directly to the establishment of the initial *ummah* of believers, a kind of "kingdom of God on earth". The body of believers was thus an earthly community that was entitled and exhorted to defend its identity against all who would oppose it or stand in its way. It was thus clearly Muhammad's objective to establish a theocratic, Muslim state and community and to protect and maintain its identity by fighting those who resisted it.

The later passages of the Qur'an give Muslims the right to take up arms against all-comers who threaten the Muslim ummah and to slay them wherever they be found (Surah 2:190-191). The book even contains an open licence to make war on all who do not acknowledge Islam, including Christians, until they "feel themselves subdued" (Surah 9:29).

It is thus quite apparent what the natural consequence and, indeed, express objective of the Hijrah was. Although the concept of jihad, fighting in the way of God against unbelievers, was a novel one in Arabian society, the principle of faith versus unbelief as a justifiable cause for physical warfare became one of the tenets of Islam. Nonetheless, despite its religious character, the employment of force of arms for the subjugation of opponents, whether in self-defence or otherwise, is historically nothing more than the customary method of establishing an earthly rule. It has been resorted to throughout the ages.

It was this very means which Muhammad adopted to protect the *ummah* of Islam against its opponents and, when he was strong enough, to subdue them. Its express purpose was to safeguard and expand the visible identity of the people of Islam as a distinct community on earth. The Hijrah led perforce to the concept of what can best be described, in Christian terms, as a visible kingdom of God on earth, and its very character necessitated the use of forceful means to protect its identity whenever this appeared to be threatened.

5. The Contrasting Path Chosen by Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ could have chosen a similar path to that chosen by Muhammad. Not only were the Greeks prepared to welcome him but the Jews in Galilee also were only too willing to make him their king (John 6:15). The opportunity to gather a band of loyal followers around him and stage a revolt was presented to him on numerous occasions. Nevertheless, when the chance to escape from the designs of the Jews suddenly came to him as he entered Jerusalem for the last time, he resisted it and set himself positively on the road to his moment of destiny - the cross.

There were many people in Israel in those days who attempted to overthrow the Roman rule and establish themselves as the leaders of the Jewish race. The notorious Barabbas was just such a man, one who had been "thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder" (Luke 23:19). Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher of the law in Jerusalem, spoke of other such men who had arisen at various times in the nation's history and had endeavoured to overthrow the existing rule by forceful means:

"For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered". -- Acts 5:36-37.

So likewise Bar Kochba gathered a number of men around him in 130 AD and attempted to drive out the Romans as well. In each case the usual means was resorted to - the followers were armed with weaponry and sent forth to fight in the name of God against unbelievers.

Jesus was different. The Jews tried more than once to persuade him to aspire to become the ruler of the nation and enable it to resist the unbelieving Gentiles by force of arms, but he resisted the temptation every time it came his way.

At last the moment of crisis, the hour of destiny, arrived. Jesus sat together with his disciples on the Thursday night after his entry to Jerusalem the previous Sunday when the Greeks had sought to see him. He knew that the Jewish soldiers would come to arrest him that night and would look for him in the Garden of Gethsemane where he usually met with his disciples (John 18:2). Even now escape would have been easy enough for him but instead he went straight to the very place where he knew they would come for him, knowing everything that was to befall him (John 18:4). "I have come to this hour" he had boldly declared (John 12:27) and when he saw the crowd coming towards him with lanterns, torches and weapons he said:

"The hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners". -- Mark 14:41

At this very moment his disciples saw what was about to happen and they cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword"? (Luke 22:49). Simon Peter immediately drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the servants of the high priest. At the hour of crisis the followers of Jesus were possessed with the spirit of jihad. The sword was promptly unsheathed by Peter in the defence of his master in fulfilment of his pledge that he was willing to die for Jesus (Matthew 26:35).

Jesus, however, had rejected the whole idea of a hijrah or jihad. If Peter had laid down his life for Jesus it would have been a courageous act of martyrdom. But Jesus had come to lay down his life for Peter and for all his followers instead. He had come to bring new life to them and sought to open the door so that they could be transformed into true men of God and inherit eternal life. He said to Peter:

"Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?" -- Matthew 26:52-54.

To the astonishment of his disciples he promptly healed the ear of his captor! (Luke 22:51). This was the opposite of the spirit of jihad, it was the spirit of sacrificial love and grace. He did not seek to destroy his enemies by means of jihad so that he might live, he was willing to be destroyed so that even his enemies might live and be reconciled to God (Romans 5:10). In one breath he commanded his followers once for all to sheathe the sword. He had not come to set up an earthly ummah which was to be defended by force of arms, he had come to prepare his followers to become citizens of the kingdom of God, a heavenly ummah.

When Jesus was brought before Pilate the next day the Jews laid the false charge against him that he had been attempting to set himself up as a king in opposition to Caesar. Pilate duly asked him if he was the King of the Jews and why he had been handed over by his own nation. Jesus answered him:

"My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world". -- John 18:36

"My servants would fight", he said, if he had come to set up an earthly ummah, just as Muhammad's servants duly did to protect him and his community of followers. But his kingdom, as he said, was not of this world. He had come to make the kingdom of heaven accessible to men on earth and to prove the love of God by paving the way for them to become citizens of heaven. He was not interested in a hijrah to preserve his life on earth, nor in a jihad to protect an earthly community. He sought to establish a heavenly kingdom and the only way to achieve this was entirely different to the path of jihad.

The kingdom that was not of this world that Jesus came to establish was a heavenly one, a kingdom of love, grace, holiness and peace. He did not seek to subdue his enemies, he came into the world because he was endowed with heavenly love for them. He sought to save them and, to achieve this, he was willing to lay down his own life for them. He came to establish a spiritual people constituting one body over all the earth, not to be gathered into an earthly community to be protected against all other tribes and nations, but to be united in one spirit, secure and prepared for a kingdom ready to be revealed at the last time. He therefore chose the only possible path that could bring his mission to fulfilment.

6. The Cross - the Choice of the Saviour of the World

On the night that Jesus was arrested the hatred of those who sought to destroy him was finally given an opportunity to express itself. The Jewish leaders, who were his sworn enemies, immediately took steps to have him put to death and within less than twenty-four hours he was nailed to the cross. His disciples were shattered. They "had long hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21) and, in this moment of apparent defeat, it appeared that all was suddenly lost. His enemies were jubilant. At last they had him in their power and were determined to see him put to death before their very own eyes.

As Jesus hung on the cross he seemed to be a failure. All his labours appeared to have been in vain. While the hijrah had taken Muhammad from the depths of disconsolation to the prime of success, the cross took Jesus to an

early grave. It was all so sudden and unexpected. It had seemed that the chief priests could do nothing to withstand him. Suddenly they had laid hold of him and had arranged a swift execution.

What went through the mind of Jesus at this point? Did he regret not taking the many opportunities he had enjoyed to escape from the Jews? Did he look back on the occasion a few days earlier when the Greeks had desired to talk with him and wish he had hearkened to them? Did he despair in the sudden horror of all that had befallen him? Did he curse his enemies in his heart for achieving what they had so long sought?

Not one of these thoughts entered his mind. Shortly after he was crucified he spoke from the cross and he prayed in these words:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do". -- Luke 23:34

The crucifixion did not catch Jesus by surprise at all. He had often predicted that he would be crucified (Matthew 17:23, 20:19) and as the time approached he spoke of it as his "hour" (John 12:27). On the night of his arrest he plainly told his disciples that he was about to be betrayed (John 13:19) and in everything he said during his arrest, trial and crucifixion we find him reacting without surprise to the events that were rapidly unfolding against him.

He spoke of this hour as the moment which he had anticipated and as the one in which he was to be "glorified" (John 12:23; 13:31). He looked toward it as the climax of the glorious work he had been sent to fulfil. He did not view it as a sudden disaster that he should have anticipated and fled from in hijrah fashion, he saw it as his moment of glory, as the occasion he had long awaited when the fulness of his love was finally to be revealed. The moment had come for him to achieve what he had long been constrained to accomplish (Luke 12:50).

He did not cry out from the cross in despair, nor did he curse those who had condemned him. He prayed that they might be forgiven. He was willing to suffer in their place and be consumed that they might be forgiven. *He died so that his enemies might live.* He revealed the perfection of his Father's love for those who hated him by enduring on the cross the penalty that was due to them for their sins. In his crucifixion he gave the ultimate proof of God's love for wayward sinners.

Jesus Christ chose the opposite path to that chosen by Muhammad. The cross was the antithesis of the Hijrah and its objectives were the opposite of those sought in the escape from Mecca. Muhammad fled his enemies only to engage in battle with them and slaughter them so that he and his companions might live. Jesus made no attempt to escape from his enemies that fateful night but gave himself up for them and died that they might live.

When God called on Abraham to sacrifice, he tested him to see whether he loved him so much that he would give his very own son for him. When this same God, the eternal Father, willingly gave his own Son for the human race and took the initiative in securing the forgiveness even of his enemies, he manifested to the full his love for mankind. Muhammad willingly destroyed those whom he considered to be the enemies of God, but in Jesus Christ God willingly forgave those whom he knew to be his own enemies so that they might live instead.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. -- 1 John 4:9-10.

From an earthly point of view it may yet appear that Muhammad's decision to flee his enemies was a wiser one than the decision of Jesus to passively give himself up to them. After all, Muhammad's decision was the turning-point in his mission. Twelve years of frustration in Mecca were soon to be forgotten as the Islamic ummah was established at Medina and as Muhammad grew in power and authority. Successes became increasingly regular and in the end he was able to return to Mecca with an overwhelming force and conquer his enemies. At the time of his death he had subdued virtually the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. Did he not die in peace, beholding the triumphs of his mission?

After only three years ministry Jesus was suddenly apprehended and put to an untimely death in what was generally considered to be a shameful and disgraceful manner. His small band of disciples deserted him and his

enemies gloated over him in triumph. Did not his life, in contrast with Muhammad's, end in miserable defeat and apparent disaster?

As he hung on the cross, two thieves who were crucified with him began to mock him with the Jewish leaders for claiming to be the Messiah (Matthew 27:44). After a while one of them again reviled him, calling on him to come down from the cross and save them if he really was the Messiah. It was to be the last temptation from Satan to Jesus to express himself as a worldly Messiah and make a public display of his real authority and conquer all his enemies. At this late hour, however, the other thief finally repented and had a change of heart. He said to his fellow criminal:

"Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong". -- Luke 23:40-41

But what good would such repentance do at this moment for a hardened criminal who had done no good in his life at all and was now only a short while from death? With his hands and feet nailed to the cross, what could this enemy of God do to redeem himself, one who not an hour earlier had heaped abuse on the Anointed one of God? In his moment of helplessness and complete demoralisation he said to Jesus:

"Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power". -- Luke 23:42

He finally perceived that the crucifixion of Jesus was not a sudden defeat but the very purpose for which he had come into the world and in penitence asked only to be remembered, even as the most undeserving of sinners and least of men, the last man who might hope to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus immediately replied:

"Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise". -- Luke 23:43

A faint hope that he might yet obtain access to the kingdom of God as the last man in was transformed in a moment into a full assurance that he would be the very first man to die after Jesus Christ in true faith and walk with him that very day into Paradise!

The Hijrah opened the way for Muslims on earth to obtain temporary security in the ummah of Islam. *The cross opened the way for all true followers of Jesus to obtain eternal life in the kingdom of God.* Apparent defeat was about to be transformed into glorious victory. At first glance the Hijrah might appear to have been a wiser choice than the cross. When viewed in perspective, however, the opposite turns out to be the case.

7. The End Result: The Glorious Kingdom of God

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ stands with his resurrection from the dead and ascension to heaven forty days later. The only historical record of the life of Jesus is found in the Bible and it testifies to both the crucifixion and resurrection as facts of history.

Who really succeeded in his mission - Muhammad who lies dead and buried in Medina, or Jesus who reigns in life in heaven above? The Hijrah led Muhammad to Medina, the seat of his earthly ummah, but the cross led Jesus to resurrection and glory in the kingdom of heaven, the realm of eternal life. Muhammad duly went the way of all flesh as his earthly body returned to dust in a city made of dust. Jesus returned to heaven and to "a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Hebrews 11.10).

What striking parallels and contrasts there are between the events that led to the Hijrah, which Muhammad chose, and the cross, to which Jesus submitted himself. Ultimately, however, it is the contrasts and their consequences that fix themselves before our eyes. Jesus could have chosen to escape and find refuge among the Greeks, but what good would that have done? The seed would have remained alone. It had to die if it was to bear much fruit and so Jesus willingly gave himself up to die on the cross. But he rose again from the dead and his atoning work guarantees life beyond the grave to all who believe in him. How gloriously this wondrous statement sets forth the success that he wrought through his crucifixion and resurrection to life three days later:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live". -- John 11:25

One fact cannot seriously be ignored - death brings disaster on all men. "They all lived happily ever after" is the myth of the average fairy story. The true human destiny is quite another thing. All men, no matter what their achievements, waste away and come to nothing. For many the demise of the body is a painful, humiliating experience. No real success can be achieved in a world where all come to nothing eventually. Death is the dreadful consequence of sin and it holds all men in its vice-like grip.

Jesus Christ obtained the greatest victory this world has ever seen when he conquered death and rose from the grave. This is the one, supreme success story of history. No other remotely compares with it. While men continue to die all over the world, one man - just one man - sits alive in the heavens above and has done so for nearly two thousand years. While billions lie in the dust, one man alone enjoys the power of eternal life having not only conquered death but having also risen above the perishable world below, where all is bound to decay, into the realms of heaven where all is imperishable and unfading.

Both Jesus and Muhammad planned to return to the places where they had been so ruthlessly opposed. Muhammad returned to Mecca some years after the Hijrah in triumph over his foes who were this time bound to acknowledge his claims. Death, however, was not far away and within two years it took him permanently into the earth where he remains to this day.

Jesus, however, visited death first, burst out within three days from the grave, and ascended to heaven. From there he will return in triumph to reign over his foes, when every knee will bow to him and every tongue will be constrained to confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). Similarities there are indeed between Jesus and Muhammad, but the contrasts are far more striking.

Muhammad established the ummah of Islam at Medina which asserted itself after the conquest of Mecca. Jesus has also chosen a people for himself, but his community is yet to be revealed in its glory. At the cross he wrought salvation - on his return he will raise to glory all true believers who are presently interred, "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:13-14).

He will come not only in triumph over his foes but also in eternal glory with those who are his own. Then the true success of his mission will be revealed. As he himself came back to life, so he will raise from the dead all who love him and follow him as their only Lord and Saviour.

Only one man could conquer death and there was only one means to achieve it. Jesus Christ was the man and his crucifixion and immediate resurrection the means. "Cometh the hour, cometh the man" - of no man could these words be more truly said than of the Saviour of the world who, when the hour came, did not shirk its terrors but graciously endured them all so that those who believe in him might share his total victory and look forward, as all true Christians do, to the Day of their Redemption when he will return and raise them from the dead to eternal life.

Will you not believe in the Living Saviour of all men, Jesus Christ, and join the ummah of true believers who are assured of eternal life and a place in the kingdom of heaven ready to be revealed in the last time?

Nuzul-I-Isa: The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

by John Gilchrist

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It is not every day that one sees a man being lifted from the earth to heaven with the assurance that he will return centuries later to stand on the earth again. Such an event must surely demand the attention of those who profess to believe that it will occur, and all the more so when the world's two greatest religions, whose adherents jointly number half of those who dwell on the earth, both make this very profession about the same man. Christianity and Islam both hold to the firm conviction that Jesus Christ, who lived in the land of Israel nearly twenty centuries ago, was raised alive to heaven and will return to earth in the fulness of time. No one can regard such a belief purely as a tenet of each respective faith. The implications are so profound that the subject must be studied further.

It is universally believed, in both the Christian and the Muslim worlds, that Jesus will come again to this world at the end of the age. Although the two religions differ in their estimate of how he shall appear and what he is due to accomplish when he returns, they both unanimously teach that he will return from the heavenly places heralding the climax of human history. It is surely incumbent, therefore, on every Christian and Muslim, to analyse this great anticipated event and to discover the real meaning and purpose of his advent and to simultaneously come to know the true identity and character of the central figure in what will surely be one of the greatest spectacles of history.

We propose to make a brief study of both the Christian and Islamic teachings about the return of Jesus Christ from heaven and will then press on to examine the implications of this great event and the real identity of the one whose advent will interrupt the course of human history and bring it to a speedy conclusion.

1. THE RETURN OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE.

One of the great themes of the Christian Scriptures is the return of Jesus to earth at the end of the age. The ultimate glory of the Messiah, God's Supremely Anointed One, was foretold by many of the prophets who went before him and the Jewish Scriptures are replete with predictions about his eternal reign. So likewise early Christian writers dwelt much on this theme. It is our purpose, however, to begin by examining the words of Jesus himself on this subject to see what he, the focal point of this great drama which is yet to unfold, taught and believed about his coming return to earth.

On the last night that he was alive before the end of his natural life on earth, he sat with his disciples and, in a long discourse in which he poured out many of the deepest truths he could convey to them, he spoke much of his eventual return to earth. He said to them:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." *John 14.2-3.*

With these words Jesus introduced a theme that was to recur again and again during his last message to his disciples. "I will come again" was his ultimate promise, one couched in terms calculated to bring comfort and hope to all who truly believe in him. He encouraged those who sat with him with the assurance that he was only going to heaven to make ready a place for them also and that he would duly return so that they could join him in his everlasting kingdom. As he continued with his deep teachings that night he went on to promise:

"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also." *John 14.18-19.*

Again the reassuring words came, "I will come to you", this time with the added promise that, just as he would be alive for ever in the kingdom of heaven, so they too would be taken to be with him and would also enjoy eternal life. As his discourse continued he returned yet again to the day when he would return to earth saying to them:

"A little while and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me." *John 16.16*

His disciples were perplexed, not understanding what he could possibly mean. Jesus promptly warned them that, as soon as he had gone, they would suffer much persecution and loss and that their lot in this world would be at best uncertain and of no abiding value. Yet to give them a thorough hope and assurance that their trials would be but for a while and that their ultimate destiny was eternal life and glory in the kingdom of God upon his return, he said to them:

"So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." *John 16.22*

Before his own disciples Jesus set his eventual return to earth as their greatest hope and the ultimate objective of their faith. A promise of eternal rejoicing was placed before them as the great reward they would enjoy by keeping their faith in him until he returned and they duly saw him again.

Jesus himself obviously regarded his ultimate return to earth as the supreme hope of all his true followers. He told them they would suffer much anguish and rejection, many tears and trials, before that day, but exhorted them to endure them all because of the glory that was to follow at his return. Not only did he make such promises to his disciples, however, but he also warned his enemies that his return would wipe away all their gaiety and confidence and would spell their eternal doom and disgrace. He boldly testified to the Jewish High Priest:

"But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." *Matthew 26.64*

The predictions he constantly made of his return to earth, therefore, were given as words of comfort to his disciples and as a warning to his foes. The former would be raised to eternal glory in heaven, the latter would be cast down to eternal punishment in hell. He spoke not of returning at some time before the end of the age but, rather, on the Day of Judgment itself and summed up his teaching in these words:

"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, and the goats at the left." *Matthew 25.31-32*.

Those at his right hand, he promised, would inherit the kingdom prepared for them from before the foundation of the world, while those at his left would be thrown into the fire prepared for the devil and all his host. The return of Jesus, therefore, in the teaching of Jesus himself as it is recorded in the Bible, will be the great, climactic event of history when he will return to judge the living and the dead, awarding eternal life to those who love and obey him while casting the rest into outer darkness where they will remain for ever and ever as objects of God's wrath and anger.

Let us now examine the teaching of Islam, as it appears in the Qur'an and the Hadith, regarding the return of Jesus to earth.

2. ISLAM AND THE DESCENSION OF JESUS.

It is universally accepted in the world of Islam that Jesus Christ will eventually return to earth. It generally agreed that he will descend in the Middle East where he will destroy the *Dajjal* (Antichrist), that he will lead the whole world to embrace Islam, that he will marry and have children, and that he will die after forty years and be buried in Medina alongside the tombs of Muhammad, Abu Bakr and Umar. The Qur'anic text invariably referred to in support of the doctrine that Jesus will return to earth towards the end of human history this one:

And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): Therefore have no doubt about the (Hour) but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way. *Surah 43.61*

The context of this verse does indeed appear to support the interpretation that the *ilm* (knowledge) of the Hour will be determined by the return of Jesus to earth. The whole passage, from verse 57 to verse 67, centres on Jesus and there can be little doubt that he is the focal point of the sign of the coming Hour of Judgment. Yusuf Ali has the following comment appended to Surah 43.61:

This is understood to refer to the second coming Jesus in the Last Days just before the Resurrection when he will destroy the false doctrines that pass under his name, and prepare the way for the universal acceptance of Islam, the Gospel of Unity and Peace, the Straight way of the Qur'an. (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p.1337).

Maulana Abdul Majid Daryabadi also has a similar comment on this verse in his translation, saying "The reference is to the second advent of Jesus" (*The Holy Qur'an*, Vol.2, p.493B). Indeed the vast majority of Muslim commentators take Surah 43.61 to be a prophecy of the descension of Jesus to earth, an interpretation sustained for centuries in Muslim writings. The anticipated event has become known as the *nuzul-i-Isa*, the "descension of Jesus".

The Hadith teach unambiguously that Jesus will return towards the end of the world. There are no less than seventy accredited traditions supporting this doctrine and they are regarded as *mutawatir*, "universally-attested" traditions of unquestioned reliability. One of these traditions reads:

Abu Huraira reported that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: By Him in Whose hand is my life, the son of Mary (may peace be upon him) will soon descend among you as a just judge. He will break crosses, kill swine and abolish Jizya, and the wealth will pour forth to such an extent that no one will accept it. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.92).

Another tradition states that "spite, mutual hatred and jealousy against one another will certainly disappear" during his reign when returns (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol.1, p.93) and in yet another tradition we read that Surah 4.159, which teaches that "there is none of the People of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) but must believe in him before his death", is also a proof that Jesus will return to earth to receive the homage of all to whom the Scriptures have been given (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol.4, p.437). Such are the testimonies to the return of Jesus to earth in Islam.

There are obviously key differences between Christian and Muslim beliefs regarding the return of Jesus from heaven but the fact of the event is universally agreed. Christians do not accept that he will come to live again as an ordinary human being on earth, least of all that he will die and be buried. He has been alive in the glory of heaven for nearly two thousand years and we find it very hard to seriously consider the suggestion that he must return to complete a life that was interrupted on earth at the age of thirty-three and live out a further forty years before dying and being buried like any other man. It is our firm belief that he is already alive for ever more in the glory of the kingdom of God and that an earthly demise at a time yet to come would be an unfortunate anti-climax and a strange anachronism. Nevertheless there are principles in the Muslim beliefs about his earthly reign that Christians can accept as symbolic of his heavenly rule yet to be revealed.

Islam teaches that he will return from heaven, that he will destroy the Antichrist and all his host, that he will lead all true believers into an era of unprecedented bliss and prosperity, that he will rule over all earth, and that he will establish a universal faith in God during his reign. To the extent that these beliefs can be transferred to a heavenly rule in an eternal kingdom, Christians can agree with Muslims.

3. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE SECOND COMING.

Islam and Christianity are agreed that Jesus will return from heaven to earth. As said already, such an extraordinary event cannot be catalogued as simply one of the tenets of each respective faith. The implications of this persuasion are so profound that it must be analysed further. The concept of a man returning to earth from the realms of heaven itself, a man who once lived on the earth many centuries ago, begs further scrutiny. The very uniqueness of the whole event and its climactic character must surely lead us to conclude that there must be something very special about the one who is at the centre of it all - Jesus Christ. The return of no other prophet is awaited by Christians and Muslims. Indeed, even in their lifetimes, the influence of each prophet of God rarely spread beyond the confines of the prophet's own community and nation, yet it is agreed between Christians and Muslims that Jesus will, on his return, assume control over the whole world. There must be more to him than mere prophethood and his return will surely usher in greater benefits than a boom period in the economies of the nations.

A key to the real meaning of the return of Jesus is found in the expression used by both Yusuf Ali and Maulana Daryabadi in their comments on Surah 43.61. Yusuf Ali speaks of the "second coming of Jesus" and Maulana Daryabadi likewise refers to the "second advent of Jesus". Some years ago, in South Africa, Adam Peerbhai published a booklet entitled *Hadis Text on the Second Coming of Jesus* which canvassed the various traditions referring to the descension of Jesus. The key is in just one word used by all three Muslim authors - the word *second*. Each one speaks of the *second coming* of Jesus, a typical Christian definition of his return and one adopted by Muslim writers without much reflection on its immediate implications.

Christians speak of the *second coming* of Jesus from heaven because they believe that *he came from heaven the first time*. If there is to be a *second coming*, there must have been a *first coming*. This is, to us, the great key behind the return of Jesus to earth. He will come from heaven a *second time* because he came from heaven the *first time*. We believe that he pre-existed and that he was in the beginning with God before anything was ever created (John 1.1). He came as a spirit into the world directly from heaven and was thus conceived in the womb of a woman without any normal human agency. This belief is to some extent supported by the Qur'an which says of Jesus that he was a *ruhun minhu*, a "spirit from him (i.e. God)", a title applied to no other human in the book (Surah 4.171). This is just what Christians believe - that Jesus came into the world the first time as a spirit directly from God and this explains why his mother underwent such a unique experience in conceiving him without the agency of a human father.

It is in this expression "*second coming*" that we see the first real implication of the outstanding event to come at the end of time. Jesus will come from heaven to earth simply because he came in precisely this manner the first time. We need to peruse some of the statements of Jesus himself which relate to this very subject to see what he said about his *first coming* into the world.

On numerous occasions Jesus declared that he had come down from heaven and in such plain language that it could not be interpreted in any other way than literally. He declared to the Jews:

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of him who sent me." *John 6.38*

In response to this the Jews murmured against him, saying "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" (John 6.42). In reply Jesus simply commanded them not to murmur among themselves about matters they did not understand, once again declaring that he had, in fact, come originally from heaven (John 6.51). When even some of his own followers began to murmur at his teaching, he said to them:

"Do you take offence at this? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" *John 6.61-62*.

Jesus spoke often about the fact that he had originally descended from heaven (John 3.13) and that he would ascend again (John 20.7), "ascending where he was before". It was his plain teaching that he had come down from heaven and that he would return there. Indeed it should not be too hard for Muslims to consider that Jesus had come down from heaven at the beginning. If it is possible for them to believe that he will come from heaven towards the end of the world, it should be equally possible and indeed logical to believe that he came from heaven in the first place.

On another occasion, while Jesus was debating with the Jews, he said to them:

"You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world." *John 8.23*.

This was an outstanding statement - "I am from above ... I am not of this world". It is a true maxim that man returns whence he came. We all return to the earth because we come from the earth. "You are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3.19). We are all from below and we therefore go back to the dust. Jesus was from above and he therefore ascended where he, too, was before. This is why he is in heaven now and why he will return from heaven - because he came from heaven in the first place. He could not have put it more plainly or simply than he did when he said:

"I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father." *John 16.28*

We do well to ask why Jesus has been kept alive in heaven for nearly two thousand years when all other men, both small and great, have returned to the dust. David lies buried in Jerusalem and Muhammad likewise lies dead and buried in Medina. Neither lived beyond a normal lifespan. "No one has ascended into heaven", Jesus said while he was still on earth (John 3.13). Why then should this one man be taken up above the clouds, indeed right out of this universe, into the presence of the eternal Father where he has been for nearly two thousand years?

There can only be one rational, logical conclusion. He must likewise have been in heaven for thousands of years before he came into the world. If he has been there for nearly twenty centuries since his ascension it is logical to assume that he had been there for at least a similar period before his first *nuzul*, his first descension into the world. Fortunately, however, we do not have to rely on logical presumptions or speculation for Jesus himself, on a number of occasions, made it plain that he had, in fact, been in the presence of God even before the world was made. When his disciples one day exclaimed to him that even the demons were subject to them in his name, he replied:

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold I have given you authority to tread upon serpent and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." *Luke 10.18-20*.

The statement that concerns us is the first one: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven". According to the Bible the fall of Satan took place when he attempted to usurp the throne of God in heaven and make himself like the Most High (Isaiah 14.14). We do not know exactly when this happened but it must have been either before or at the time of creation for he was cast down to become the devil and thus tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve. The Qur'an places the fall of the great *Shaytan*, whom it names *Iblis*, at the beginning of creation, saying that he refused to bow to Adam at God's command (Surah 34), complaining that Adam had only been made of dust whereas he had been made of fire (Surah 7.12). As a result God cast him down and expelled him in disgrace (Surah 7.18). Both the Bible and the Qur'an therefore agree that the fall of Satan took place as far back at least as the very beginning of creation, yet Jesus declared "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven". It was his way of saying "I was there in heaven, I saw it happen." This could only have been possible if he had in fact been alive in heaven before the creation of the world. Furthermore, in his last great prayer on earth he said:

"And now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." *John 17.5*

In these words we have a very clear statement by Jesus himself that he had, in fact, shared the glory of the eternal Father in his own presence in heaven before the world was ever made. We thus have clear testimonies by Jesus himself that he was alive in heaven at the very beginning of the world - is it surprising, therefore, that he will return from heaven at the end of the world?

We are now beginning to get a clearer picture of the meaning of the *nuzul-i-Isa*, the descension of Jesus to earth from heaven at the climax of history. He stands uniquely above all the prophets of God and men on earth as one who was alive in heaven at the beginning of time and as the only person today who has ascended to heaven where he has been for almost two thousand years. We will obtain further insight into his real identity and the purpose of his return to earth if we spend a little time considering how he will be recognised when he comes.

4. HOW JESUS WILL BE IDENTIFIED ON HIS RETURN.

If we were to turn on a television set one night to find satellite coverage from Damascus showing a large crowd gathered excitedly around a man claiming to be Jesus returned to earth, how would we know whether it was really him or not? If, upon being interviewed, he said "I am Isa. I returned from heaven yesterday. No one saw me, but here I am", how could you be sure it was him?

Islam has not been unaware of the possible difficulties in identifying Jesus when he returns if he is to come purely as an ordinary man of flesh and blood. A superstition has arisen that a bone will be missing in one of his fingers. This is a typical myth, but it does show the consciousness of a required means to positively identify Jesus. Even in the Hadith there is a saying attributed to Muhammad which tells how to identify him. Muhammad is recorded as saying:

There is no prophet between me and him, that is Jesus (peace be upon him). He will descend (to earth). When you see him, recognise him: a man medium height, reddish hair, wearing two light low garments, looking as if drops were falling from his head though it will not be wet. (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol.3, p.1203).

The need to identify him positively has also led to speculation as to where he will descend on earth. Some say he will land on the Ka'aba in Mecca, others that he will land on the eastern minaret of the great Umayya mosque in Damascus which is accordingly known as the *Isaya Minarah*. Maulana Syed M.B. Alam, on the cover his book *Nusul-e-Esa: Descension of Jesus Christ*, has a drawing of the Dome of the Rock with ladders alongside it.

We take the picture to mean that Jesus will return by landing on top of the Dome of the Rock and that others will help him to the ground on a ladder. It seems absurd to consider that, after crossing the vast expanse of the universe on his way from heaven to earth, he will need a ladder to help him down the last thirty feet of his descent!

It is perhaps in this seeming absurdity that we see the weakness of all Muslim theories about his descent all of which are based on the assumption that he will return as nothing more than an ordinary man of flesh and blood to rule the earth. On the other hand, a Muslim friend once said to me, "I believe Jesus will return from heaven shining like a light". I said, "What makes you say that? This is Christian belief." He replied, "Look where he is coming from. You cannot come from heaven looking like this" he said, pointing to himself. It takes an enlightened mind to draw what should be such an obvious conclusion.

He hit the nail on the head. The issue is not whether Jesus will return to Damascus, Jerusalem or Mecca, the issue is where he is coming *from*. He is *coming from heaven*. When he came the first time he assumed flesh and blood on earth and became a man but, having ascended to heaven, it is grossly unlikely that he will return as a man of nothing more than flesh and blood. His human nature must have undergone a transformation to enter the realm of the kingdom of heaven - is it not far more likely that he will return in heavenly splendour?

Jesus himself described how he will return to earth at the end of time. He told his disciples:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." *Matthew 24.29-31*.

In these words we have a far clearer picture of how Jesus will return. The sun will be darkened, the moon will lose its light, the stars of the sky will fall, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and *then*, in their place, a new brightness will appear. The whole earth will see Jesus appear in a cloud with heavenly power and glory as he calls out all those who are his own. The contrast between the present order and the new order he will bring in is finely described in this passage. The glory, brightness and power of the present order will recede before the revelation of his majesty and power when he returns from heaven.

On a dark night a car with bright headlights can almost blind another driver's vision but, if that same car should drive down the road in the middle of a sunny day, the same driver will hardly be troubled if its bright lights are on. A candle in a dark room is very conspicuous, but on a sunny day it may not even be noticed. The greater light makes the lesser fade and, as it were, be darkened. The sun is the one supreme source of light in the sky - before it all other lights fade into insignificance. No one can look directly into it without his eyes being blinded.

The point Jesus was making was this: when *he* appears in heaven even the sun will cast a shadow and be darkened. Before his glory not only the sun but all the stars will fade and recede. All the energies and powers in the universe will be shaken. His light will be so splendid that even the sun's light will not compare with it. When the Apostle Paul had his great vision of the glory of Jesus on the way to Damascus he said that he saw "a light from heaven, *brighter than the sun*, shining round me and those who journeyed with me" (Acts 26.13). The

Apostle John likewise had a vision of Jesus in heaven after his ascension and testified that "his face was like the sun shining in full strength" (Revelation 1.16).

In Jesus' own words, therefore, we get a very clear picture of how he will be recognised when he returns to earth. *No one will fail to recognise him.* He will not descend on to a mountain or minaret in a body of ordinary flesh and blood. He will be revealed from heaven in all his glory and power and his splendour will be the one dominating spectacle in that moment over all the earth, just as the sun to a lesser extent is the sole, supreme light of our present skies. All the nations of earth will see Jesus as he returns from heaven in the glory of his Father, and all those who have not followed him will be in great torment when he appears.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so, Amen. *Revelation 1.7*

5. THE PRESENT STATUS OF JESUS IN HEAVEN.

It is not every day that men are raptured to heaven. Jesus was only taken up to heaven because he had come from there in the first place. We have also seen that he will return, not as an ordinary man of flesh and blood, but as a glorious, heavenly man shining with glory and power. We must therefore ask, what is his present status in heaven?

According to the Bible the angels of heaven number "myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands" (Revelation 5.11) and the glory of any one of these angels is such that, if he was to appear to any man in all his splendour, he would blind the man's eyes (Genesis 19.11). Their power is also beyond human comprehension. Just one angel has the power to destroy a whole city (2 Samuel 24.16) or a whole human army of up to two hundred thousand soldiers (2 Kings 19.35). Yet even the angels bow before the throne of God in awe and great reverence. The glory of all God's holy angels does not even begin to compare with his surpassing splendour.

The great prophet Daniel one day had a vision of God's glory and the angels of God before his throne and described what he saw in these words:

"As I looked, "thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened." *Daniel 7.9-10.*

When Isaiah the prophet had a similar vision of the glory of God and his angels before his throne he trembled in fear and bemoaned his human weakness and uncleanness before the sight (Isaiah 6.1-5). Daniel likewise must have felt right out of place as he beheld his glory and considered himself unworthy to be there. Yet, as he gazed at the courts of heaven he saw an amazing thing happen:

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one which shall not be destroyed." *Daniel 7.13-14.*

He went on to say, "my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me" (Daniel 7.15). Well might he have been perplexed and bewildered. "One like a son of man" means one just like himself, a man of ordinary flesh and blood. He seemed to be so out of place, and yet, instead of trying to hide from the glory of heaven, he was brought on a cloud and set before the throne of God, and to him was given all the authority of heaven and earth that all the nations of earth and the angels of heaven should bow down before him.

Daniel saw a vision of Jesus Christ in heaven. He lived before the first coming of Jesus into the world when he came as an ordinary man of flesh and blood and in that form Daniel saw him. Yet, as he beheld him, he realised that, notwithstanding his human nature, he was to become the eventual ruler of the whole universe.

When Jesus was on earth his disciples saw him as an ordinary man like themselves. He was so obviously human that to this day hundreds of millions of men cannot believe that he was anything more than a man. One day, however, he took three of his disciples up a mountain and suddenly he was transfigured before them.

His face shone like the sun, and his garment became white as light. *Matthew 17.2*

For a brief moment his disciples saw something of his real glory which, during the rest of his earthly life, was veiled within his body of flesh and blood. When he ascended to heaven he returned to the realm where he had always enjoyed that splendour and glory. Is it logical to believe that he is there today as just an ordinary man, the only one to ascend to heaven, feeling somewhat lost and out of place among millions of angels clothed in heavenly glory before the splendour of God's throne? In Daniel's vision we saw this man brought before the throne itself and the authority of all the universe bestowed on him. What Daniel saw was a vision of the ascent of Jesus to heaven after his first coming when he returned in an ordinary human body.

Some time after the ascent of Jesus to heaven his disciple John had a similar vision of Jesus in heaven, only this time it was different. Daniel saw Jesus as he was to be on his return to heaven after his first coming to earth in flesh and blood - John saw him as he will be at his second coming when he will return in all his heavenly glory. He described his vision thus:

"I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle around his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength." *Revelation 1.12-16.*

Like Daniel John also saw "one like a son of man", one just like himself, but whereas Daniel saw him presented to him who sits upon the throne of heaven, John saw him as the one seated upon the throne! Daniel saw the Son of man presented to the "Ancient of Days", God himself, whose "raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool" (Daniel 7.9), but John saw the Son of man himself upon the throne of God and *he* was "clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle around his breast" (Revelation 1.13) and "*his* head and *his* hair were white as white wool, white as snow" (Revelation 1.14). John did not see the Son of man as a lone human figure out of place among myriads of angels, he saw Daniel's vision fulfilled and the Son of man seated on the throne of God ruling over the whole universe. Another early disciple of Jesus named Stephen had a similar vision as he was about to become the first Christian martyr. He cried out:

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God." *Acts 7.56*

Jesus himself went on to testify to John as he fell before his glory, saying "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Revelation 1.17-18), and, after giving him many instructions for his followers in the form of seven letters to the seven churches throughout Asia Minor, he concluded by saying:

"He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." *Revelation 3.21*

We have already seen that the Qur'an teaches that, at the creation of Adam, all the angels of God were commanded to bow down before him (Surah 20.116). It is hard to understand why such heavenly creatures should be required to bow to a man of flesh and blood who came from the dust for a season, only to return to it. Yet it is not hard to understand why the angels of God should bow before the Son of man who sits on the throne of God in all heavenly splendour, ruling over the whole universe, angels and nations put together. It is also no wonder that the Bible says of Jesus, "Let all God's angels worship *him*" (Hebrews 1.6), he who has become "as much superior to angels" (Hebrews 1.4) because he has been crowned the King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19.16).

There are nearly five billion people today alive on earth and billions of others have been buried in the earth, prophets, saints and all who have lived on the earth, small and great alike. But right now one man is alive in heaven where he ascended and from whence he will return. He has been there nearly two thousand years,

whereas few other men live much beyond a hundred years. It is surely absurd to believe that he is, to this day, nothing more than an ordinary human being. No, he sits on the throne of heaven in all his glory "with angels, authorities and powers subject to him" (1 Peter 3.22) and he will return in that same splendour to take control of all the earth until all things are subjected to his universal authority. "For God has put all things under his feet" (1 Corinthians 15.27).

We must conclude by recognising that Jesus is alive in heaven today because he came from heaven the first time, that he is not just an ordinary man but the Ruler of all the universe who will return at the end of time in all his splendour. This makes it essential that we enquire why he ever came into the world the first time and why he ever assumed human flesh. He lived in heaven for centuries before coming to earth for thirty-three years and has been alive in heaven for centuries ever since. The real question is not why Jesus ascended to heaven, the real question is why he ever came into the world in the first place.

6. THE PURPOSE OF HIS FIRST COMING TO EARTH.

There must have been a very special purpose for the coming of Jesus into the world if he came from heaven and returned there when his earthly course was over. He could not have been just a prophet for God had called many ordinary men out to be prophets and they had died at the end of their ministries and returned to the dust whence they had come. If Jesus came from heaven and returned there he must have come for a greater purpose.

There are, in the context of all that we have that far considered, two basic reasons for the coming of Jesus into the world. The first is that *he came to bridge the gap between heaven and earth*, between the God of holiness and sinful men. There is a very common phrase in the Qur'an - "To Allah is all that is in the heavens and in the earth" (Surah 2.284). Constantly the Qur'an distinguishes between the *samaawaat*, the "heavens", and the *ardh*, the "earth", and in the Bible too we find, in the very first verse of the book, the same distinction: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1.1).

No matter how long men live on earth none ultimately ascend to heaven. Of no man can it be said "he lived happily ever after". On the contrary, if we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that disaster comes to one and all. We all return to the dust when we die and come to nothing. As Jesus said, "No one has ascended into heaven" (John 3.13). There is an unbridgeable gap between heaven and earth, between God and men, and no man from the earth is able to bridge it. "God is in heaven and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5.2), is an exhortation that likewise bears out the distinction between the realms of God and men. The reason for this chasm between heaven and earth is plainly set out in this passage:

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you so that he does not hear. *Isaiah 59.1-2.*

There is a great gulf between sinful men on earth and the holy God of heaven who dwells in unapproachable light with his holy angels. Sin has destroyed the capacity in man to rise by nature above the realm of the world in which he was made. He is, by nature, nothing more than mortal flesh and blood and "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (1 Corinthians 15.50). Jesus Christ, who from all eternity was in the presence of his holy Father and his angels in the kingdom of heaven, descended to the earth and was born in human form to bridge the gap between heaven and earth. He did this by *bringing something of heaven into the world* - he brought his very own self. He became a human being in every way and lived on earth as a normal man, but the spirit within him was a divine spirit which had come down from heaven.

He not only closed the gap between heaven and earth but bridged the gap the other way as well. When he came into the earth he came, as the Qur'an rightly puts it, as a *ruhun minhu* - a *spirit* from him (i.e. God). But when he returned to heaven he returned as an *insaan*, a human being. His divine spirit returned to its heavenly abode but *he took something of earth to heaven with him* - he took the human nature he had assumed when he first came into the world. He came then purely as a spirit, but he returned as a man, as a human being. He thus fully bridged the gap between heaven and earth. His living presence in the kingdom of heaven as a human being is our pledge and assurance that we too, though mortal men of flesh and blood, can one day be in heaven with him in eternal glory and bliss.

The second, and the greatest reason for the first coming of Jesus into the world, was *to become like us in every respect so that he might save us from our sins*. Because we are only flesh and blood, "he himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Hebrews 2.14) so that he might deliver us from the power of Satan and redeem us to God. From his heavenly throne he saw all men under the power of the evil one, enslaved to sin, and unable to overcome death. He saw the need of a mediator between men and God so that they might be saved from their sins and, to compensate for our guilt and sinfulness, he became a human being just like us so that, through the cross, he might endure the consequences of our sins in our place and make it possible for us to rise from earth to heaven and become partakers of the divine nature by receiving the Spirit of God (2 Peter 1.4), just as he had, in turn, descended from heaven to earth to become partaker of our human nature by assuming a body of flesh and blood.

Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. *Hebrews 2.17*

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, so complacently overlooked in Islam as an unsuccessful plot of the Jews, alone explains why Jesus came from heaven the first time and why he will return again. He came not to be a mere prophet, he came as God's chosen Deliverer and Redeemer to save millions of men and women by dying for them on the cross of Calvary, where he endured what was due to all of them for their sins, so that they might receive the hope of eternal life by following him as their Lord and Saviour.

He did not come like the Superman of the American comics, a man who can fly through the skies at his own discretion and from whose body bullets simply bounce off. He came like us in every respect and at no time did he use his divine powers to give himself any advantage over us. He came as a normal human being and he suffered, died and was buried so that he might bridge the gap between heaven and earth completely not only between God and men but to the very extreme of sinful man's separation from the Lord of heaven - between God and sinful men who lie hopelessly dead and buried in the dust of the earth.

Islam teaches that Jesus will return to earth because he did not finish his ministry as it likewise teaches that Jesus was raised to heaven without being crucified. It is no wonder that it teaches that Jesus did not accomplish his mission. It makes the life of Jesus on earth end just six hours before Christianity does, yet in those six hours that Jesus spent on the cross the whole purpose of his coming to earth was indeed fulfilled. In his last great prayer the night before he died he said:

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." *John 17.4*

In triumph he could boldly claim that he had indeed *accomplished* the work he had been given to do. As he began to breath his last on the cross, knowing that he had fully satisfied God's wrath against sin and that he had just accomplished the greatest work ever to be done by a man on earth, he cried out in triumph, "It is finished" (John 19.30). The original Greek text has only one word to describe this exclamation and it can, perhaps, more accurately be translated simply thus: "*Accomplished!*". He had descended from heaven to earth, had become an ordinary man and was now at the point of death and about to be placed in a tomb. But this was no moment of defeat for him. It was all victory, the fulfilment and accomplishment of all that he had been sent to achieve to bring men back to God. It is against this background alone that we can conclude our study and discover why Jesus will return at the end of time and what he is destined to do for those who love him as their supreme Lord and Master.

7. WHEN THE LORD JESUS IS REVEALED FROM HEAVEN.

Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven whence he is to return. We have already seen that he came into the world to make himself like us in every way so that he might save us from our sins. What, then, is the supreme purpose of his second coming? It is just this - that *he might make those who believe in him just like himself*. The first time he was manifested in human flesh, the second time he will be revealed in all his heavenly glory and the whole earth will see him as he really is. Then those who have followed him will likewise be transformed into his image to be made just like himself. One of his disciples could confidently write to his Christian brethren:

"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. *1 John 3.2*

He will return shining with all the brightness of his heavenly glory, and then those who are his will be transformed into the same image and share his glory. After declaring that all sinners and evildoers will be cast into the fire on the Day of Judgment Jesus said "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13.43). Those who have died in ordinary human bodies, who nevertheless followed him as their Lord and Saviour will, on that glorious Day, be raised from the dead and taken up to be with him in heavenly glory for all eternity. Their present bodies are perishable, but they will be raised imperishable. They are mortal now, but then they will be raised immortal. They share now the ordinary human body of flesh that Adam, their first father, shared, but on that Day they will inherit the same resplendent, heavenly body of spirit and life that Jesus Christ, their eternal Saviour and Lord, already shares.

As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven. *1 Corinthians 15.48-49.*

The great Christian hope is to be raised from the dead to eternal life on that Day just as Jesus himself was raised from the dead. This was the supreme purpose of his coming into the world, not just to teach, preach and heal as if he were an ordinary prophet, but to give effect to the ultimate hope of all mankind - the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. No earthly prophet could bring such a thing about - only the Lord of Glory from heaven could do so.

When Jesus heard one day that his friend Lazarus was ill in Bethany, instead of going down to heal him, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was (about a hundred kilometres away) and deliberately let him die (John 11.6). As soon as he suggested to his disciples that they should go down to Judea again, where Lazarus had been buried, they were appalled at the suggestion, exclaiming "Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" (John 11.8). Their immediate fear was that he was going there only to die. But when Jesus insisted, Thomas said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him" (John 11.16). The spectre of death hung over the whole scene. Even when Jesus got to Bethany and found that Lazarus had been dead four days already, the two sisters of the dead man both said to him "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11.21, 32), and some of the Jews, weeping in consolation with them, said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (John 11.37). The pall of death hung like a cloud over the scene.

The attitude of all of them was the same - if only Jesus had been there, in the right place at the right time, he could have healed Lazarus while he was still alive. But now that he was dead, what could Jesus do? The seemingly irreversible shadow of death hung over the whole place and Jesus appeared to have arrived too late to do anything.

The recent Superman film which did the rounds showed an incident where a huge truck was leaning over a bridge. Superman was called for and he flew through the sky in his fancy costume to lift it up with his great power. Before he arrived, however, the truck toppled into the river below. When Superman finally got there he was told "It is too late now" and, despite his powers, there was nothing he could do.

Jesus wore no fancy costume. He did not come with power to fly through the skies, nor did he have superhuman powers to lift heavy objects. He was made just like us, but he had come for one supreme purpose and, as he arrived at the tomb of Lazarus, he did not stand by impotently as Superman was obliged to do. He challenged Martha, one of the dead man's sisters, saying, "Your brother will rise again" (John 11.23). When she replied that she knew her brother would be raised on the Last Day, that he would be raised by a God who was far off on a day that seemed extremely remote, Jesus made a declaration that sounded forth with all the authority of heaven and breathed newness of life into an apparently hopeless situation. He said to her:

"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" *John 11.25-26.*

In the midst of the deathly atmosphere that prevailed over the scene came a glorious exclamation from one who in their very presence was not just a healing prophet but the very source of the resurrection and eternal life that will be given to all that believe in him and follow him. As a sign of the supreme purpose for which he had come

to earth, he thereupon raised Lazarus from the dead and gave him back to his sisters. In that environment of death and despair - the destiny of all men sooner or later - Jesus Christ, there and then the Resurrection and the Life himself, demonstrated the real purpose of his first coming.

Shortly after this great miracle he himself rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. Those who believe in him are now reaching out to one who has already conquered death, and who is even now alive in heaven for evermore. He alone is the world's hope of the resurrection and eternal life in the age to come.

The Qur'an often speaks of God as he who "bringeth the dead to life" (Surah 2.73). There are more than twenty passages which speak of God's power to raise the dead to life, to give *haya* to the *mayyitun* (e.g. Surah 10.31). Yet in one verse we read that Jesus said: "I give life to the dead by God's permission" (Surah 3.49) and in another verse God himself speaks of Jesus' power to raise the dead by his leave (Surah 5.113). Apart from these verses which attribute to Jesus the power to give life to the dead there is no other passage attributing to any other prophet or man the same power. In the Qur'an itself, therefore, we find that *God's power to raise the dead has been given to Jesus alone*. Here is a clear confirmation of the fact that Jesus did not come into the world purely as a prophet to preach and teach.

Jesus came the first time to conquer sin and rise from the dead in triumph, thus securing for his followers the assured hope of the resurrection at the Last Day. Jesus will return on that Day to raise all his own from the dead, to give them the fulness of eternal life and to make them just like himself in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the supreme meaning and purpose of the *nuzul-i-Isa*, the second coming of Jesus.

Instead of limiting him to the status of ordinary prophethood along with other mortal men, will you not put your faith in him as the appointed Lord of heaven and earth and be raised to eternal life on that Day "when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven" (2 Thessalonians 1.7) to be glorified in all his saints? Or will you rather "shrink from him in shame at his coming" (John 2.28)? Will you not commit your life to the only man who has conquered death, who alone dwells in heavenly glory above billions of men on earth, both dead and living, and who alone will return to earth shining in all his heavenly majesty to award the crown of life to all who love him and remain faithful to him even unto death itself? Will you not bow to him as your Lord and Saviour and be saved by his grace?

Al-Masih-Isa: The Glory of Jesus The Messiah

by John Gilchrist

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Who was Jesus of Nazareth? Was he the Lord and Savior of all men as Christians believe? Was he just a prophet as Islam teaches? Was he an impostor as the leading Jews of his time claimed? (Matthew 27.63). Who really was this man Jesus?

There are few people in history who have demanded the attention of the world as Jesus has and few popular figures have been debated about as much as he has been. Indeed, right from the beginning, during the early days of his ministry, there was much discussion about him among the Jews, some approving of his good works with others claiming he was leading the people astray (John 7.12). The disputes continued right through his ministry.

One day, when Jesus was retiring with his disciple to the district of Caesarea Philippi to the north of the Sea of Galilee, he asked them:

"Who do men say that I am?" *Mark 8.27*

They answered that some said he was John the Baptist, raised from the dead, while others claimed that he was Elijah and yet others that he was one of the prophets. The general consensus of opinion was that he was a prophet. John the Baptist is mentioned as a prophet in the Qur'an under the name *Yahya* (Surah 3.39) and Elijah is likewise named as one of the prophets under the name *Ilyas* (Surah 37.123). The Jews concluded that Jesus was one of the prophets - which one, they were not sure - but nonetheless a prophet, no more, no less. So likewise Islam today regards Jesus (*Isa* in the Qur'an, Surah 3.45) as a mighty prophet of God, but nevertheless as no more than a prophet.

After his disciples had told him that the Jews all appeared to agree that he was one of the prophets, he turned to them and said, "But who do you say that I am"? (Mark 8.29). One of them, Simon Peter, answered him:

"You are the Messiah". *Mark 8.29*

Peter's reply was, "the people may say that you are only a prophet, but I say you are far more than a prophet - you are the Messiah" (In most English translations the original Greek word *Christos* is usually translated "Christ", but as the Greek word itself is a translation of the Hebrew *Mashiah*, we shall always use the word "Messiah" in this booklet). The Jews had long believed that their Messiah was coming into the world and it was universally believed that he would be far more than a prophet. Peter's exclamation was clearly intended to be in contrast with the opinion of the masses. They were prepared to accept Jesus as a prophet but he was willing to go much further and declared Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah.

The Jews cherished the hope that their Messiah would be a political leader who would free the nation from the Romans and set them up as the greatest nation on earth in a timeless reign of unparalleled prosperity. As Jesus regularly resisted their attempts to set him up as the King of the Jews (John 6.15) and spoke to them of their own need to repent and humble themselves before God, they turned away from him. The whole Christian world throughout the centuries, however, he has openly declared Jesus to be the true Messiah and has also accepted him as far more than a prophet, indeed as the very Lord and Saviour of all mankind (Titus 2.13).

1. AL-MASIH: THE MESSIAH IN THE QUR'AN.

Islam, on the contrary, only accepts Jesus as a prophet like all the other prophets. In one passage he is joined with Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and Moses as simply one of the prophets (*an-nabiyyin*) between whom no distinction of any kind is made (Surah 2.136). In another verse he is said to have been no more than a servant (*abd* Surah 43.59) and in yet another as nothing more than a messenger (*rasul* - Surah 5.78). One would therefore expect to find the Qur'an denying that Jesus was the Messiah, especially as the Jews and Christians have always regarded the title as signifying more than prophethood and as Peter's testimony that Jesus was indeed the Messiah was intended to be in contrast with the opinion of the Jews that he was only one of the prophets sent by God.

It comes as a surprise, therefore, to find that the Qur'an openly admits that Jesus was the Messiah. He is often called in the Qur'an *al-Masih Isa* - "the Messiah Jesus" (Surah 4.157, 171). The title *al-Masih* ("the Messiah") sometimes appears by itself (Surah 4.172) and on other occasions he is called *al-Masihubnu Maryam* ("the Messiah, son of Mary" - Surah 9.31), but on each of the eleven occasions where it appears the title *al-Masih* - the Messiah - is applied specifically to Jesus alone. The Qur'an even goes so far as to say that right in the beginning, when the angel Gabriel first appeared to Mary he deliberately stated that the name of her son was to be *al-Masih Isa* (Surah 3.45). Islam thus joins Christianity in declaring Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah promised to the Jews through the prophets of old.

Nevertheless, as said before, the Qur'an's acknowledgement that Jesus was indeed the Messiah comes as a surprise, for it denies that Jesus was anything more than a prophet, whereas the promises of God about the coming Messiah had made it plain that he would be far greater than a prophet. The Christian confession that Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of all men is thus consistent with the teachings of the former prophets that the

coming Messiah would be the supreme man of history, far above all the prophets (2 Samuel 7.12-14). The Qur'an on the other hand, declares *Maal-Masihubnu Maryama illa rasul* - "the Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than an apostle" - like the other apostles who had passed away before him (Surah 5.78). Why, then, does the Qur'an also acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah if it denies that he was anything more than a prophet?

It is significant to discover that, while the Qur'an unreservedly applies the title *al-Masih* to Jesus, it attempts no explanation of it. This is all the more surprising in view of the Jewish and Christian belief that the title is reserved to the specially-chosen one of God, one man alone who stands above all other men, prophets and apostles included. The declaration that the Messiah was only an apostle appears to be self-contradictory and the Qur'an's complete silence on the meaning of the title hardly serves to avoid this conclusion.

The Qur'an's suggestion that Jesus was only a prophet is not only clearly compromised by its own admission that he was indeed the Messiah, but the issue is intensified even further by the fact that it calls Jesus, without exception in every case where the title appears, *al-Masih* - *the* Messiah. The definite article positively distinguishes him from all the other prophets. Not only is no other prophet in the Qur'an called Messiah, but by describing Jesus as *the* Messiah, the Qur'an declares that the application of this title to anyone else would be quite inappropriate.

Not only does the Qur'an attempt no explanation of the meaning of this title but even great scholars in Muslim history like Zamakhshari and Baidawi admitted that it was not an original Arabic word. The average Muslim will be hard-pressed to venture a plausible explanation of this supreme title given to Jesus, *al-Masih*, based on the use of the word in the Qur'an, and consistent with the claim that he was in no way different to the other prophets who went before him. It is therefore quite clear that we shall have to turn to the Bible if we are to find the true meaning of the title.

2. THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF THE MESSIAH.

The common word used for Messiah in the Christian Scriptures, in the original Greek texts, is *ho Christos*. Twice it is said to be a translation of the word *Messias* (John 1.41, 4.25) and, as in the Qur'an, no attempt is made to define or explain the meaning of the title.

Nevertheless, just as the Qur'an uses the definite article *al* to apply the title to Jesus alone, so in the Christian Scriptures he is constantly called *ho Christos*, that is, *the* Messiah.

Throughout our scriptures the title is set forth applying to God's supreme Deliverer who was eagerly awaited by the Jews. It is therefore to the Jewish Scriptures that we must turn to find its real meaning. In many places in the original Hebrew texts we find the word *mashiah*, meaning "anointed". It is applied to the anointed high priest in Israel (Leviticus 4.3) as well as the nation's king (2 Samuel 1.14). It is also given to the prophets of God (Psalm 105.15) as well as to the Persian king Cyrus who was anointed by God to prepare the way for the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple after its destruction by a previous king, Nebuchadnezzar (Isaiah 45.1). The prophet Daniel, however predicted that after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, a prediction of time would pass whereafter a *Mashiah*, an "Anointed One", would come (Daniel 9.25). This use of the word as a title for the coming Prince of God led the Jews speak freely of him as *ha Mashiah* - "the Messiah".

The prophets of old spoke regularly of this great personality who God promised would come to the nation. The great prophet Isaiah spoke of him in these words:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist, and faithfulness the girdle of his loins. *Isaiah 11.1-5*.

The prophet went on to say of him: "In that day the root of Jesse shall stand as an ensign to the peoples; him shall the nations seek, and his dwellings shall be glorious" (Isaiah 11.10). The prophecy clearly could not be applied to any of the prophets who were appearing at times among the people. It spoke of one man alone who would rule the whole earth and who, by the breath of his mouth alone, would slay the wicked. In another passage of the same prophecy we read that God himself said of this coming Ruler:

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations *Isaiah 42.1*

One after the other the prophets of Israel foretold the coming of this supreme representative of God on earth who would bring the justice of God to the whole world and rule over it. Through another prophet God also spoke of the coming Anointed One and described his glory in these words:

"Behold the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall grow up in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honour, and shall sit and rule upon his throne." *Zechariah 6.12-13*.

The Jews began to realise that, whereas prophets arose at fairly regular intervals to declare the will of God, one great figure was to follow them all who would be far above all the prophets of God in honour and majesty. This supreme ruler was destined to be God's own chosen representative who would establish his kingdom and rule upon his throne. Through yet another prophet God foretold where he would be born:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days. *Micah 5.2*

As the predictions increased, so the outstanding features of the coming chosen one of God became more apparent. In this prophecy it was plainly stated that the coming ruler, although yet to be born, had in fact existed in the heavens from the beginning of time. Daniel the prophet gave a climactic review of his coming glory and authority when he described a vision he had seen during his time of exile in Babylon:

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." *Daniel 7.13-14*.

It was little wonder that the Jews concluded that the Ruler of God's own kingdom, whose origin was from old, and whose dominion would last for ever, was to be far greater than a prophet. When Daniel spoke of him a God's "Anointed One" (Daniel 9.25), the title *Mashiah* stuck and became the common title to describe him. "The Messiah" became their long-awaited Ruler and Deliverer.

We therefore see that the title "Messiah" clearly means, not just a prophet among many prophets, but God's supremely Anointed One, whose origin was from of old and whose rule over the whole universe would last forever. It was an apocalyptic figure they awaited, the climax of God's revelations to the world. *Ha Mashiah* he was called - *the* one and only supremely anointed, chosen one of God to rule over all his dominions.

This brief survey of the real meaning of the title *al-Masih*, that is, "the Supremely Anointed One", shows how inappropriate the Qur'anic statement *Maal-Masihubnu Maryama illa rasul* - "the Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than an apostle" (Surah 5.78) - really is. The whole meaning of the title *al-Masih*, as considered in its original Hebrew context, totally negates the suggestion that the one bearing this title was, after all, only an apostle like others who had gone before him. One can only presume that Muhammad did not know the meaning of the title *al-Masih* and, hearing it freely applied to Jesus by the Christians, unquestioningly adopted it without realising that it completely undermined his belief that Jesus was only one of a long line of prophets.

3. THE MESSIANIC HOPES OF THE JEWS.

We have only considered a few of the predictions of the coming Messiah, yet these are sufficient to show that the Jews had every good reason to believe that he would be a majestic figure, far greater than any of the prophets who went before him.

At the time Jesus was born the Jews were eagerly awaiting their coming Messiah. They had been ruled for centuries by a succession of foreign, Gentile powers. Both the Persians and the Greeks had had their turn and, about sixty years before the birth of Jesus, the Romans conquered Judea and assumed control of the province. The Jews strongly resented this succession of foreign rulers and longed for their coming Messiah. They believed that, as they were the physical descendants of Abraham through his promised son Isaac, they enjoyed the special favour of God over all other nations. Accordingly, when they heard that *Mashiah* was coming, they presumed that the prophecies about his eternal reign over the kingdom of God would be immediately fulfilled in the establishment of the Jewish race as the greatest nation on earth with all other nations subject to it. They believed the Messiah would be a climactic figure who would bring in God's eternal rule on earth.

A brief survey of some of their expectations about the coming Messiah, as expressed in their utterances recorded in the Gospel of John, one of the records of the life of Jesus in the Bible, give us some idea of the kind of Messiah they were awaiting. On one occasion, when Jesus told them that the Son of man would be "lifted up" (John 12.32, cf. John 8.28), a prediction of manner of his death to follow a few days later by crucifixion (John 12.33), the Jews answered him:

"We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains for ever. How can you say that the Son of man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of man?" *John 12.34*

They recalled the prophecies of their former prophets which foretold the eternal reign of the Messiah. They could not understand how Jesus could speak of the "lifting up" of the Messiah, the Son of man, to die. On another occasion they recalled the prophecy of the prophet Micah that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Although Micah did not describe the ruler he spoke of as the Messiah, yet by his mention of the fact that he had existed long before the world was made, they realised that he spoke plainly, not of an ordinary prophet to arise among men, but of the Messiah whose goings forth were from everlasting days and whose reign would last for ever. The prophecy clearly applied to the one great supremely anointed Ruler and Deliverer to come. When some of the Jews said of Jesus, "This is the Messiah" (John 7.41), others recalled this prophecy about the place of his birth and said:

"Is the Messiah to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village David was?" *John 7.41-42.*

Because Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, they presumed he could not be the Messiah. It appears that they were unaware that he had, in fact, been born in Bethlehem in perfect fulfilment of Micah's prophecy that he would come from this small Judean village (Luke 2.4-7). On yet another occasion, when some of the people questioned whether, perhaps, Jesus really was the Messiah, they said to themselves:

"Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Messiah appears, no one will know where he comes from." *John 7.27*

The outstanding predictions of the coming Messiah, especially those which made it plain that he had already existed right through the ages and would come from heaven, made the Jews speculate that no one would really know whence he had come. In reply Jesus told them plainly that they really did not know where he had come from (John 7.28) and on other occasions bluntly told them that he had, in fact, come down directly from heaven (John 6.38, 6.51).

The question whether Jesus really fulfilled the prophecies of the coming Messiah does not really concern us, however. While stating plainly that he did in that he was an eternal personality who came from heaven into the world as the Son of man, we nevertheless must constantly bear in mind that Christianity and Islam both unreservedly acknowledge that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. This is not an issue between us - the question is

purely one of the true meaning of the title *al-Masih* which is left unexplained in the Qur'an. There can be no valid dispute between Christians and Muslims as to the identity of the Messiah, however. It was clearly Jesus.

The important thing to note here, however, is the expectations of the Jews at the time of Jesus regarding the coming Messiah. They were wrong when they expected him to exalt the nation and set himself up as a ruler of an earthly kingdom, but they were quite right insofar as they believed that he would come from heaven, would have existed for ages prior to his advent, and would ultimately establish the kingdom of God and rule over it as its Lord and Sovereign. In these convictions we can plainly see that *ha Mashiah*, the long-awaited, promised Anointed One of God, was anticipated as a glorious figure far above the status of the prophets who had preceded him.

The first great mistake of the Jews was to fail to distinguish between the two separate advents of the coming Messiah. Their scriptures indeed foretold the coming of a glorious King who would establish the kingdom of God and rule over it forever and ever, but these same scriptures, as we shall see, also spoke of a phase of relative obscurity when the Messiah would first suffer and come apparently to nothing. In truth these prophecies referred to two separate occasions when the Messiah would appear on earth - firstly to suffer in a comparatively insignificant lifespan, and secondly to return in a glorious triumph over the established kingdom of God. Christians take these predictions to refer, firstly to the life of Jesus on earth when he was relatively unknown and apparently devoid of rule and authority, and secondly, to his return at the end of time when he shall return to establish the kingdom of God and rule over it as the manifestly Anointed One of God, now visibly triumphant in a glorious reign of power over all the universe. As Islam itself accepts that Jesus will return to earth, it should not be too hard for Muslims to accept these two distinct phases in his revelation as the Messiah, the supremely Anointed One of God. Islam itself accepts that Jesus will have a universal rule when he returns to earth.

The second great mistake of the Jews was to presume that they, as an earthly nation, would constitute the kingdom of God and that the Messiah would be a Jewish king ruling on the earth as we know it over the nations. They failed to see that God was speaking of a heavenly king who would become the Messiah by appearing in human form and that his rule and authority would be a spiritual one over the true people of God, the true followers of the Messiah in spirit and truth, and that it would only be manifested at the end of time.

The one great perception of the Jews, however, indeed the one thing in which they were most certainly not mistaken, was that the Messiah would not be a mere prophet or messenger but that his origin would be in heaven, that his goings forth would be from many ages past, and that his throne and rule over the kingdom of God would be established as an everlasting dominion. These were vital perceptions and it is a great pity that they could not see that the Messiah would first come in relative obscurity to prepare the way for his dominion before it would be finally established and revealed in all its fulness at the end of time when he would return to the earth in glory and power.

4. JESUS OF NAZARETH: GOD'S ANOINTED MESSIAH.

We have already seen that the Qur'an openly acknowledges that Jesus was indeed *al-Masih*, "the Messiah", the long-awaited Deliverer whom God had promised. We have also seen how the Jews failed to recognise the Messiah when he came because they could not fully understand the prophecies of the former prophets regarding him and the purpose of his coming to earth (Acts 13.27). We now proceed to see whether Jesus regarded himself as the Messiah and whether his coming was announced.

The Qur'an openly acknowledges John the Baptist (*Yahya*) as a true prophet of God and confirms that he was announced to his father Zakariya (Surah 3.39). He is listed along with Jesus, Elijah (*Ilyas*), and a number other prophets as one of the righteous messengers of God to whom favour was given over the nations (Surah 6.84-86). As the Qur'an states that all the prophets were equal to one another and that no distinction is made between them, we would not expect to find John regarding Jesus as superior to himself. If they were both kinsmen of equal prophetic status, John would hardly have looked on Jesus as more worthy of honour and respect than himself or any other of the prophets who went before him.

Yet, when we read a contemporary record of John's life and ministry, we find that he looked toward the coming Messiah as one far superior to himself. As all people of that time were in expectation of the coming Saviour and "questioned in their hearts concerning John whether perhaps he were the Messiah" (Luke 3.15), John replied to them all:

"I baptize you with water; but he who is mightier than I is coming, the thong of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." *Luke 3.16*

John clearly regarded the coming Messiah as far superior to himself, even though he was a true prophet of God, so superior in fact that he boldly proclaimed that he was not even worthy to bow at his feet and untie his shoelaces. On another occasion he said:

"You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Messiah but I have been sent before him ... He must increase, but I must decrease." *John 3.28, 30*

He clearly regarded the Messiah as far mightier than himself and on yet another occasion he gave way to him, saying of Jesus as he saw him coming towards him:

"This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me'." *John 1.30*

These statements were all consistent with those of the former prophets who had predicted the glory of the coming Messiah whom John openly identified as Jesus. John too spoke of the pre-existence of the Messiah as Micah and others had done before him and, being the only prophet to rise at the same time as Jesus, rejoiced at the honour of being appointed to reveal him to the nation (John 1.31). He was indeed sent from God, but only as a prophet to bear witness to the true light who was coming into the world just as the former prophets had done. "He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light" (John 1.8).

Some months later a Samaritan woman came to the well of Jacob at Sychar and saw Jesus sitting next to it. A brief discussion followed and, when she saw that he could see right through her and could read the background of her life, she said, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet" (John 4.19). Yet, as he continued to discuss with her and now began to speak of a new age that was about to be brought in where opportunities would arise for all men in all nations to have a living knowledge of the truth of God in their hearts and thus worship him fully in spirit and in truth, she sensed that he was far more than a prophet and said to him:

"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things." *John 4.25*

To this Jesus openly replied, "I who speak to you am he" (John 4.26). Her question was an indirect way of prompting Jesus to disclose himself - was he just another prophet or was he possibly God's Supremely Anointed One, the heavenly ruler of ancient days who would bring the full and final revelation of God to man? Jesus gave her an emphatic answer - *I am he*. On another occasion, when the Jews said to him, "How long will you keep us suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly" (John 10.24), Jesus again answered quite openly "I told you and you do not believe" (John 10.25). He had no doubt whatsoever that he was the Messiah, the man of glory foretold in the prophecies of the prophets who came before him. Indeed, when the high priest of Israel himself directly asked him "Are you the Messiah...?" (Mark 15.61), he answered equally directly, "I am" (Mark 15.62).

Jesus of Nazareth, the lowly man from a village in Galilee, was indeed God's Messiah, his Anointed One whom he had promised to send into the world as its Saviour and Deliverer. Both the Bible and the Qur'an openly declare Jesus to be the Messiah and it is therefore incumbent on every Christian and Muslim to acknowledge him as such. Much time has been spent showing that the Messiah was to be far greater than any of the prophets of God.

The time has now come to analyse who he really was and what he was sent to accomplish as God's Anointed One and chosen Saviour on earth.

5. WHAT DO YOU THINK, WHOSE SON IS HE?

Among the many prophecies of the coming Messiah were regular promises that he would be descended from David, the great prophet and king who foreshadowed his coming in many ways. A distinct prophecy of this kind was given to the prophet Jeremiah some six hundred years before Jesus was born. Although the elders of Israel turned away from leading the nation in God's ways, he promised to send a Deliverer:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he shall be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'." *Jeremiah 23.5-6.*

Once again the prophecy contains hints of the Messiah's glory but, as the Jews could not distinguish between the first coming of the Messiah in comparative obscurity and his second coming in a blaze of glory, they failed to identify Jesus as the one promised when he came. But they got one thing right - the Messiah would be descended from David. A very similar prophecy appears in Jeremiah 33.14-18 and also in Ezekiel 34.24, where David is openly identified as the forerunner and type of God's supreme shepherd and prince to come.

The most emphatic promise of the coming Messiah as one of the sons of David, however, was made to David himself. During his great reign as king over Israel David sought to build a great temple to house the ark of the covenant of God. Through the prophet Nathan, however, God stopped him from doing so, at the same time making this promise to him:

"Moreover I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house. When your days are fulfilled to go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son; I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from him who was before you, but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever." *1 Chronicles 17.10-14.*

When Solomon, David's son, duly built a great Temple for God (known in Islam as *baitul-muqaddas*, "the holy house", and spoken of in Surah 17.7 as *al-masjid* - "the Temple"), it seemed that the prophecy had been fulfilled. Nevertheless, shortly after Solomon's death the kingdom of Israel was split in two and within three hundred years fell away completely, Solomon's temple being destroyed in the process.

The Jews then realised that God had, in fact, been speaking ultimately of the Messiah as the prophecy had been couched in eternal language - "I will establish his throne for ever ... I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom for ever and his throne shall be established for ever" (1 Chronicles 17.12,14). God had clearly spoken of his Supremely Anointed One who would establish his kingdom and rule it for ever. Solomon and his temple were clearly only shadows and types of the Messiah and his kingdom to come. "One of your own sons", therefore was to be applied ultimately to David's "greater son" yet to come, the Messiah, who would be descended from David's line. As a result the Jews coined the express "Son of David" as a title for their coming Messiah and often used it of him to identify the line of offspring from which he would rise. "Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" (John 7.42), was the constant belief of the Jews, a belief Jesus Christ fulfilled when he was born of David's line in Bethlehem (Matthew 2.1).

It is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew that about two days before his crucifixion, Jesus engaged in lengthy debate with the Jewish leaders. Firstly the Pharisees and then the Sadducees tried by every verbal twist and trick to trap him in his talk. At the end of the day, when their efforts were exhausted and they all were standing before him, he finally put a question to them. It was to be the last time he would engage in debate with them. He said to the Pharisees:

"What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" *Matthew 22.42*

They promptly answered: "the Son of David", in accordance with the prophecies in their holy scriptures. Jesus then replied to them:

"How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet'? If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?" *Matthew 22.43-45.*

David, said Jesus, called the Messiah his Lord and Master, how then could he be David's son? What man looks on his son as his lord and master? We read that "no one was able to answer him a word, nor from that day did any one dare to ask him any more questions" (Matthew 22.46). This momentous question ended all debate between Jesus and the Jews.

Any Jew in the crowd who had been awake, however, could have given a very complete answer to the question. Let us go back to the prophecy Nathan gave David that one of his sons would establish his throne forever and ever. We have read it already, but let us now repeat the key words of God to David. He said of the Messiah who would be descended from him:

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son." *1 Chronicles 17.13*

I will be his Father and he shall be my Son, God said to David - a prophecy contained to this day in the scripture of the Jews, a people who no more believe that Jesus is the Son of God than Muslims do. Yet there it is, right in their scripture. Any discerning Jew could have said, in answer to Jesus' question, "What do you think of the Messiah, whose son is he?" (Matthew 22.42) - "he is the Son of God", for so God had spoken to David. This is why David called the Messiah his Lord, for he knew that although he would be descended from him, God would be his true Father and he would be God's Son. He might well have said, as John did, "After me comes a man who ranks before me, for he was before me" (John 1.30).

David knew that the Messiah would be the Son of God and therefore openly called him his Lord and Master. "The Lord said to my Lord" to David meant simply "The Father says to his Son, sit at my right hand till I put thy enemies under thy feet." In one of the great Psalms of old God spoke of the coming glory of the Son of David at his second advent at the end of time:

"He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation'. And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. My steadfast love I will keep for him forever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. I will establish his line forever and his throne as the days of the heavens ... Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me." *Psalms 89.26-29, 35-36.*

No one but the Son of God could so boldly address the Lord of heaven and earth. Bedded into the glorious predictions of the coming Messiah, who would rule the kingdom of God for ever and ever, are clear statements that he would be God's own Son. The promises to this effect came directly from God himself. The Messiah, God's Supremely Anointed One, would far surpass the prophets in glory and majesty because he would be no less than the Son of God himself.

Jesus himself gave the answer to his own question how the Messiah could be both the Lord and the Son of David at one and the same time. In the last great book of the Bible and at the very end of the book Jesus made this bold declaration:

"I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star." *Revelation 22.16*

Because he was David's offspring he could indeed be called his son, but he was also his root and was therefore rightly called his Lord. In effect Jesus was saying "I am indeed the Son of David, his offspring, for I am descended from him. But ultimately I am his root, for he came originally from me." We have already seen that a host of prophecies spoke of the Messiah as one who would come from "ancient days", from the beginning of the world. How gloriously the exalted status of Jesus the Messiah is described in these words:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together." *Colossians 1.15-16*.

"The world was made through him", another scripture says (John 1.10), and in this way he could truly be said to be *the Root of David* (Revelation 5.5), his ultimate Lord and Master. "What do you think of the Messiah, whose son is he?" Jesus asked the Jews, a final, climactic charge at the end of his public confrontation with them. Its significant timing makes it universal for all men in all ages. What do *you* think of him - whose son is he really? Moses wrote of him (John 5.46), Abraham rejoiced to see his day (John 8.56), and David called him his Lord (Matthew 22.45), Jesus declared. If such great prophets as these recognised that his coming would herald the arrival of God's Supreme Ruler and Saviour, should not all men bow before him even now and become heirs of the hope of eternal life, which is in him, and partakers of the glory which is to be revealed when he, Jesus the Messiah, returns to bring forth the kingdom of God over which he will rule for ever?

We have now seen who the Messiah really was. We must press on and conclude with a study of what he came to do at his first coming and what he will achieve at his return at the end of time

6. THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF GOD.

As already pointed out, the Messiah came the first time in relative obscurity. Jesus was a lowly man, living in a small village in Galilee, an insignificant district north of Judea which itself was an unimportant province in the vast Roman Empire. Most of the Jews missed their Messiah because they confused the prophecies of his second coming, which all foretold his eternal glory and rule over God's everlasting kingdom, with those of his first coming which spoke of him as a humble servant destined to suffer reproach and rejection by the masses who would not follow his path of righteousness and holiness.

Throughout the prophecies in the writings of the former prophets there are predictions of his coming sufferings. Indeed, in the very prophecy in which he is called *Mashiah*, from which the title "Messiah" came, there is a plain statement that he would be struck down in the middle of his course.

And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off, and shall have nothing. *Daniel 9.26*

The prediction was quite clear: "*mashiah* shall be cut off, and shall have nothing." This was a direct warning that the Anointed One of God would be suddenly struck down and killed - a clear reference to the death of Jesus the Messiah on the cross which came quite unexpectedly upon his disciples.

There are many such predictions in the writings (e.g. Jeremiah 11.19, Lamentations 3:30 etc.), but we shall confine ourselves to the three most prominent passages which foretold the coming sufferings of the Messiah. The first is Psalm 22 where the spirit of the Messiah spoke through the prophet David, beginning with a cry of desolation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22.1). These are the exact words that Jesus himself uttered from the cross a millenium later (Matthew 27.46). The promised Messiah himself took these words on his own lips during his hour of trial, so we can see right from the outset that the Psalm is a Messianic prophecy anticipating his sorrows. The prophecy continues:

But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; "He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him." *Psalm 22.6-8*.

As the prophecy develops we hear the cries of a desolate man being reviled by those around him for his commitment to God. Indeed, as the chief priests stood around the cross after Jesus had duly been nailed to it, they mocked him saying:

"He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God'." *Matthew 27.43*

This insult was precisely that which was foreseen in Psalm 22.8. The priests seemed to be blissfully unaware that they were reviling him just as the prophecy a thousand years earlier said they would. Right from the outset we see the crucifixion and sufferings of Jesus being foretold in fine detail centuries beforehand. The suffering one goes on to cry in his heart:

Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones - they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots. *Psalm 22.16-18.*

He had just cried out that all his bones were out of joint and that his tongue was cleaving to his jaws (Psalm 22.14,15), words which describe precisely those sufferings that a crucified person would undergo in his ordeal. In verse 16 there is a blunt statement, "they have pierced my hands and feet", which can only be a prediction of the crucifixion of the one thus suffering. Crucifixion was only invented some centuries later by the Phoenicians and it is remarkable to find a clear prediction of the crucifixion of the Messiah, his hand and feet duly being pierced, many ages before the form of execution was actually invented.

The last verse contains an unusual riddle. The speaker says that those gloating over him would divide his clothing among themselves and would cast lots for them. This riddle would have confused those who first heard it - were his garments to be split up and divide among the bystanders or were lots to be cast for them? It is only in the story of the crucifixion of Jesus that the riddle is solved. We read:

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." *John 19.23-24.*

The garments of Jesus were duly divided among the soldiers but, as his tunic had no seam, lots for it we cast alone. The Gospel writer had no hesitation in stating that this incident fulfilled Psalm 22.18 to the very finest detail of its contents (John 19.24). We therefore see that the suffering of the Messiah, through which he would be "cut off", was clearly predicted to be by crucifixion and that its attendant events were foretold in fine detail.

Psalm 69 is a similar Messianic prophecy of the great prophet David. Agonising like a man suffocating in deep waters the same man cries: "I am weary with my crying; my throat is parched" (Psalm 69.3). He continues:

More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause. *Psalm 69.4*

On the night before his crucifixion Jesus plainly told his disciples that this very prediction in their prophetic writings was about to be fulfilled in him (John 15.25). As he had done with Psalm 22, Jesus deliberately applied the sufferings of the despised one in Psalm 69 to himself. The theme is so similar to that in Psalm 22 as we see in this cry:

For it is for thy sake that I have born reproach, that shame has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brethren, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for thy house has consumed me, and the insults of those who insult thee have fallen on me. *Psalm 69.7-9.*

The first part of verse 9 is also directly applied to Jesus in the Christian scriptures (John 2.17) and in the following section, which likewise speaks of the agonies and desolation of the suffering Messiah, another point of detail occurs which was fulfilled at the crucifixion as it had been foretold.

I looked for pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. *Psalm 69.20-21.*

When Jesus cried out "I thirst" shortly before he expired on the cross (John 19.28), the bystanders took a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink (John 19.29). Once again we have a prophetic text written centuries before the crucifixion of Jesus which foretold his sufferings and the events around it in fine detail.

Our last passage not only predicts the sufferings of the coming Messiah but also gives the full reason for them, namely that he would suffer that others might be healed and die that others might live. It comes from the prophet Isaiah who lived some centuries before Jesus was born and begins:

Behold my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. As many were astonished at him - his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the sons of men - so shall he startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which has not been told them they shall see, and that which they have not heard they shall understand. *Isaiah 52.13-15.*

The text contains clear predictions of the coming glory of the Messiah at his second advent, but in between these promises of his ultimate exaltation comes a clear warning of his rejection and suffering at his first advent - "his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance". The prophecy contains an unambiguous declaration that he would have no apparent honour at his first coming and would generally be overlooked and rejected by his people:

He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. *Isaiah 53.2-3.*

Almost immediately after this, however, comes a clear prediction of the atoning character of his sufferings. In this Jewish scripture written some six centuries before the coming of Jesus we find his crucifixion foreshadowed, not as a defeat, but as the means by which many would be saved:

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. *Isaiah 53.4-6.*

These words clearly show that the great chosen servant of God, the long-awaited Messiah, would have the sins of the world placed on him in his hour of trial and that he would die that others might live. "Stricken for the transgression of my people" (Isaiah 53.8) he would be, dying for the sins of those he was suffering to save. Once again we not only find the sufferings of the Messiah foretold but also attendant events which were fulfilled to the letter. The next verse states:

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death. *Isaiah 53.9.*

Here again we have a riddle - how could a man be buried with honour among the wealthy if his grave was prepared among the wicked? In the crucifixion of Jesus we have a perfect answer. All Jews put to death by crucifixion were, upon their demise, cast into a large pit reserved only for criminals. But when Jesus died, a rich man named Joseph of Arimathea came and took the body of Jesus and buried it in his own tomb which he had hewn out of a rock (Matthew 27.60). The prophecy continues with a similar detail: "he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53.12). As with Psalm 22 and Psalm 69, Jesus directly applied this prediction (and thus the whole prophecy) to himself the night before he was crucified, saying to his disciples as he sat at table with them:

"For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was reckoned with transgressor for what is written about me has its fulfillment.'" *Luke 22.37.*

We see quite plainly, therefore, that the prophets of old foretold that the coming Messiah would suffer and die for the sins of the world at his first coming and, to give substance to their predictions, they recorded fine detail events surrounding the climactic hour of desolation to come upon him, all of which were duly fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus. These great prophecies, made and recorded centuries before his coming, are incontrovertible proofs that Jesus the Messiah came not simply as a prophet to teach the people but as God's anointed Saviour to save them from their sins.

7. THE GLORY OF GOD'S ANOINTED SAVIOUR.

Nevertheless the majority of the prophecies in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures refer, not to the first coming of Jesus, but to his second coming as the eternal Lord of Glory. It has been estimated that there are up to five hundred prophecies relating to his second coming. On that Day he will be revealed in all his glory.

Let us not anticipate, however. We left off at the point of crucifixion and death of Jesus the Messiah in fulfilment of the hosts of prophecies foretelling his sufferings and atoning work. Did he simply come to nothing and remain buried in the tomb? Not at all. The Bible plainly teaches that *Jesus rose from the dead* on the third day and subsequently ascended to heaven. Indeed, in the three great passages predicting the sufferings of the Messiah, we find clear hints and predictions of his resurrection.

The first twenty-one verses of Psalm 22 contain a heart-rending plea for comfort as the subject of the Psalm cries out in awful anguish to God in heaven above. In the following verses, however, the tone changes completely. The subject cries out in complete peace and in joyful triumph:

I will tell of thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee: You who fear the Lord, praise him! all you sons of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you sons of Israel! For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. *Psalm 22.22-24.*

The rest of the Psalm is a glorious expression of confidence in God for his complete deliverance and faithfulness towards the one who just a short while before was expiring in considerable agony and desolation. The sudden transition can only be explained in one way - the one who but a few days before was suffering and dying in unimaginable agony had suddenly been raised to perfect health and newness of life. It is important to note that the confident exclamation of praise in the congregation of the righteous in verse 22, following immediately upon a long section of despairing isolation, is applied directly to Jesus Christ himself in Hebrews 2.12. The passage is a clear prediction of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead after his awesome ordeal and trials just a few days earlier.

In Psalm 69 we find precisely the same thing. Here too the first twenty-nine verses set out the inward pleas of a suffering man staring an awful death in the face. The passage comes to a climax when the subject, the Messiah, cries out "But I am afflicted and in pain; let thy salvation, O God, set me on high!" (Psalm 69.29). Suddenly the whole Psalm changes into an exclamation of praise and triumph as the subject, in perfect peace and joy, praises God for the wonderful deliverance he has suddenly experienced:

I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. *Psalm 69.30.*

Once again we have a clear foreshadowing of the resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. The lonely agony of the greater part of the Psalm suddenly gives way to a glorious expression of triumph and praise as the subject glorifies God in the remaining verses for his salvation.

Needless to say, Isaiah 53 too contains obvious prophecies of the resurrection of the Messiah after his death through which he wrought salvation for all those who were to become his own by faith in him. The prophet contains this wonderful promise that his lonely death would not be in vain:

When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his band; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. *Isaiah 53.10-11.*

Although he would die for the sins of the world, he would yet see the heirs of his salvation, he would yet look in triumph on the immense benefits of his redeeming work, and the fulness of God's saving grace would yet be brought to light in his own hands. "He poured out his soul to death", the prophecy continues (v.12), yet the Lord God of heaven himself left him with the assurance that he would still, in good time, obtain the fruits of his victory.

There are many other prophecies of the resurrection of the Messiah in the writings of the former prophets. David himself plainly foretold that he would rise again to life in these words:

For thou dost not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fulness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore. *Psalms 16.10-11.*

David could hardly have been speaking of himself as he both died and was buried and his tomb remained untroubled through the centuries that followed (Acts 2.29) He passed away and was laid with his fathers and his body duly saw corruption (Acts 13.36). Just as his son Solomon was only a type of the Messiah, so that the Jews soon realised that the prophecies of the eternal rule of the Son of David referred not to Solomon but to David's greater son, the Messiah, so the disciples of Jesus realised that David's prediction that God's holy one would not see corruption after his death was not to be applied to the prophet himself but rather to his offspring, the coming Messiah. As one of Jesus' closest companions duly declared just after his resurrection from the dead:

"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses." *Acts 2.30-31.*

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that Jesus himself made much of the fact that the former scriptures foretold not only the crucifixion of the Messiah but also his resurrection. On the very day that he was raised from the dead he joined two of his disciples who were walking to Emmaus near Jerusalem and he discussed with them as they walked. Their eyes were kept from recognising him, but in the end he rebuked them, saying:

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" *Luke 24.25-26.*

Indeed, when he was gathered together with all his disciples that same evening, he said to them: "These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled" (Luke 24.44). And what was it that was written about him by Moses, David and all the other great prophets who preceded him? Just this:

"Thus it is written that the Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." *Luke 24.46-47.*

Jesus plainly told his disciples that all the previous prophets had spoken of both his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead three days later. The same close companion of Jesus referred to earlier once wrote to the early companions of the Messiah, saying:

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; they inquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of the Messiah within them when predicting the sufferings of the Messiah and the subsequent glory. *1 Peter 1.10-11.*

Here again is a clear reference to the two advents of the Messiah - the first time to suffer, the second to reign in glory. Forty days after his resurrection Jesus ascended to glory in heaven where he has been alive for nearly twenty centuries. On the great Day of Judgment he will return to earth, not like his first coming when he came almost unnoticed as a baby child born in a stable of common Jewish parentage. At his second coming he will return in all his glory.

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. *Revelation 1.7.*

In perfect humility he came the first time as a lowly man, apparently no different to his kinsmen. He sought not to be praised as one of the kings of earth but was content to appear in the form of a servant. And being found in

human form be emptied himself further and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2.8). From the heights of heaven he did not disdain to plumb to the lower parts of the earth. His condescending grace and humility, however, were to lead him from the depths of human despair to the heights of divine glory and triumph.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. *Philippians 2.9-11*.

As another scripture says, God "raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1.20-23). Such is the glory to which he has attained.

Jesus the Messiah is destined to reappear at the end of time in unspeakable glory. He was no ordinary prophet. He came from heaven where, in his eternal spirit, he had been throughout all ages. He was not raised up purely as a messenger to preach and teach, he was sent from above to bring the salvation of God to all the earth. He did not simply die and return to dust, he was raised from the dead in an outstanding victory over death and hell, and he returned to his eternal home in heaven where he rules to this day.

The Messiah was no ordinary messenger of God. "I came from above", he declared (John 8.23), and he will yet return from above to reveal the true children of God, establish the kingdom of God, and be anointed as its ruler for ever and ever. *Al-Masih* the Qur'an calls him, "the Anointed One" it duly owns him to be, yet in all its teaching it unwittingly robs him of his glory, suggesting he appeared only as a messenger and that he will return as a servant. If so, then there is no meaning in the title. Its specific application to Jesus alone loses all meaning if he is discounted and regarded purely as prophet among prophets.

Jesus the Messiah is the Lord and Saviour of the world, the one whom God set forth for the salvation of all who are prepared to believe in him as their only Master and Deliverer and commit themselves in faith to him as the one who will return as the Ruler of the Kingdom of God. Will you not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah in all that the title really means and submit to God's Supreme Anointed One who once appeared to die for your sins and who will appear a second time to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9.28)? Will you not believe in him as your Lord and Saviour and be saved?

The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible

by John Gilchrist

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For too long Christians and Muslims have debated their differences of belief about Jesus Christ in a context which has allowed scant room for discussion about those points in the Qur'an and the Bible where these two books are in agreement about certain features of his life and personality.

The time has come, surely, for Christians and Muslims to analyze these points of agreement for we are unlikely ever to come to a consensus of belief about Jesus until we begin by seriously reflecting on those facts where the Qur'an and the Bible are in agreement. While these two books may differ in the interpretation of the facts they both admit, we can confidently study these points as a stepping-stone to the true knowledge of Jesus simply by virtue of the fact that the facts are themselves common cause between Islam and Christianity.

It can safely be assumed that where the Qur'an and the Bible agree in any matter, that matter can henceforth be accepted as true without further ado by Christians and Muslims alike. It may well be necessary for both of us to prove these facts to outsiders but it is not necessary that we prove them to one another if they are admitted in the books we respectively believe to be the Word of God. However, as in recent years a liberalistic trend has infected and diseased both religions, where some of their nominal adherents have abandoned the plain teaching of the Qur'an and the Bible about Jesus purely so that they can reduce this man to the level of common humanity and strip him of all his glory and honour, it will be profitable to begin by briefly mentioning and proving four very significant points about the life of Jesus where the Bible and the Qur'an are in agreement about the relevant facts.

1. TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE.

a). The Virgin-Birth.

This first feature - so strangely denied in some of the peculiar quarters of Islam and Christianity - is one of the most obvious and unambiguous teachings of the Qur'an and the Bible and is fundamentally upheld by both books. It is referred to more than once in the Qur'an but is particularly set out in some detail in Surah 19, verses 16 to 34. The following verses from this passage are here quoted to prove the point:

And make mention of Mary in the Scripture, when she had withdrawn from her people to a chamber looking East, and had chosen seclusion from them. Then We sent unto her Our spirit and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man. She said: Lo! I seek refuge in the Beneficent One from thee, if thou art God-fearing. He said: I am only a messenger from thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a faultless son. She said: How can I have a son when no mortal hath touched me, neither have I been unchaste? He said: So it will be. Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me. And it will be that We may make of him a revelation for mankind and a mercy from Us, and it is a thing ordained. And she conceived him, and she withdrew with him to a far place. Surah 19:16-22.

If Mary had conceived by another man, why would the angel have appeared to her to explain the conception of her son? Clearly from the text we can see that the angel had come not only to set her mind at rest about the pregnancy she was about to experience but to explain that this unique event was simply the effect of God's desire to make this son a revelation for mankind. She was to conceive him in a special way because there was to be something special about her son. Secondly, what other interpretation can be derived from the words "How can I have a son when no mortal hath touched me, neither have I been unchaste?". These words clearly imply that Mary was a virgin when the child was conceived.

It is surely not necessary to press this point further. The language of the Qur'an is unambiguous about the virgin-birth of Christ and further support for it is found in Surah 4:156. In that verse Mary is cleared from the base charge of the Jews that she had illegitimately conceived Jesus out of wedlock. Again Surah 21:91 explains the conception of Jesus as the direct action of God within an unmarried woman who was completely free of any unchastity.

Surely this is even more abundantly proved by the title Jesus is given more often than any other in the Qur'an - the son of Mary. It is common in Semitic communities to name a man as the son of his father, for example, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, Muhammad ibn Ishaq (early historian of Islam), Zaid ibn Sabet, etc., but we do not find men named as the sons of their mothers. Why then is Jesus so often called the son of Mary (Isa ibn Maryam) in the Qur'an? Surely the striking repetition of this name as well as its exceptional character demand that Jesus was born of his mother alone. Is not the frequency of this title evidence of the unique manner of the birth of Jesus? In the Qur'an the names of women are conspicuous by their absence. Surely the mother of Jesus is mentioned by name so regularly because of her significant place in human history as the only woman to bear a son while still a virgin. This alone can explain the prominence Mary receives in the Qur'an. It is safe to conclude that the Qur'an teaches the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ.

No right-thinking man will deny that the Bible also teaches the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ. Throughout its history the Christian Church has held to this belief and we need only quote this passage to prove that the doctrine is soundly based on the Bible:

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus". Luke 1:26-31.

Twice the mother of Jesus is plainly described as a virgin in that passage. When she replied to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Luke 1.34), the angel then explained that the conception would not be by human means but by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. We are particularly privileged to have a second, independent account of the virgin-birth in the Bible and it is set forth in this passage:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins". Matthew 1:18-21.

Once again the conception of Jesus is described as being the result of the work of the Holy Spirit and once again, as in the Qur'an, it is found that an angel appears to explain the phenomenon, in this case to Joseph. Why should there be these instances of angelic manifestations to explain the birth of Jesus if his mother had conceived him through some other man? The texts speak plainly for themselves and there can be no question about the birth of Christ. The angel appeared to Joseph and Mary to explain to them both that the conception of Jesus was by the special intervention of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore Christians and Muslims have, in the birth of Jesus, something in which the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed. These two books both teach as a fact that he was born of a virgin-woman by the will of God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

b). The Sinlessness of Jesus Christ.

It is a simple matter to prove from the Qur'an and the Bible that Jesus was absolutely without sin through out his life. When the angel appeared to Mary, the Qur'an says that he told her "I am only a messenger of thy Lord that I may bestow on thee a faultless son" (Surah 19.19). The Arabic word for "faultless", *zakiyya*, implies that he was totally without sin.

In the Bible there are numerous proofs of the sinlessness of Jesus Christ. Passages proving the point are:

He committed no sin, no guile was found on his lips. 1 Peter 2:22

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5. 21

You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in in him there is no sin. 1 John 3:5

At this stage, however, it will be profitable to note that in the Qur'an and the Bible, Jesus Christ alone is described as sinless. He is emphatically described as such in both books. No other prophet or man is so described. Nevertheless both books describe the sins of other prophets and both leave us with the firm impression that Jesus alone was without sin. (In the Qur'an, in Surah 19.19, the unique birth of Jesus is explained by the angel as the medium for the faultlessness of the son of Mary. This implies that a man cannot be faultless unless he is born of a virgin-woman. Hence Jesus Christ, being the only man to be born in this way, must of necessity also be the only sinless man who ever lived). The Qur'an attributes sin to the following prophets:

1. **Adam.** "And their Lord called them, saying: Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you: Lo! Satan is an open enemy to you? They said: Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If thou forgive us not and have not mercy on us, surely we are of the lost". Surah 7:22-23.
2. **Abraham.** "And Who, I ardently hope, will forgive me my sin on the Day of Judgment". Surah 26:82
3. **Moses.** "He said: My Lord! Lo! I have wronged my soul, so forgive me". Surah 28:16
4. **Jonah.** "And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy". Surah 37:142
5. **Muhammad.** "So know, O Muhammad, that there is no God save Allah, and ask forgiveness for thy sin and for believing men and believing women". Surah 47:19

Jesus Christ was never commanded to pray for forgiveness because he was faultless. We also never find him praying for any faults, wrongs and sins such as the Qur'an attributes in the verses quoted to other prophets. He never wronged his soul, nor was he blameworthy. Instead the Qur'an emphasizes that he was entirely without sin and was faultless. We can therefore conclude by saying that the Qur'an teaches that of all men, Jesus Christ alone was sinless.

In the Bible the universal effect of sin is recorded often, but it will be sufficient to quote these words to prove the point:

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one. Romans 3:10-12.

The Bible plainly teaches that no man, other than Jesus Christ, has ever faithfully sought out God and done good all his days. Every other man has at some time turned away from him and sinned against him.

Once again, we find that Jesus Christ alone is sin- less. So we find that as the Qur'an and the Bible both teach the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ, so they both al- so teach that he alone was sinless and faultless.

c). The Ascension of Jesus.

One of the standing orthodox beliefs in Islam about Jesus is that he ascended to heaven. The ascension of Jesus is mentioned in the Qur'an in these words:

Allah took him up to Himself. Surah 4:158

The text plainly implies, not that Jesus was taken to the second sky or third heaven, as some suppose, but that God took Jesus to himself. That is, he took him into his own glorious presence in the highest heavens.

The Bible confirms this in some detail but we need only quote a few passages here to prove both the ascension of Jesus and his exaltation at the height of the heavens in the presence of Almighty God.

And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven". Acts 1:9-11

Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1

Which God accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion. Ephesians 1:20-21.

"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made". John 17:4-5.

So we see that both the Qur'an and the Bible teach the ascension of Jesus, not just into heaven, but indeed above the heavens into the ultimate presence of God. (The only Hadith that exist on the ultimate destiny of Jesus confirm that he went to heaven. While there are many Hadith supporting the ascension of Jesus, there are none against it).

It is well-known to Christians and Muslims that the Qur'an and the Bible differ on the time and cause of the ascension of Jesus, but what is of extreme importance is that they both agree on the fact - that Jesus did indeed ascend to heaven and is alive there to this day.

d). The Second Coming of Jesus.

The last point of agreement between the Qur'an and the Bible on the life of Jesus that concerns us is the second coming of Jesus. As with the ascension, the Qur'an is backed by many Hadith on this point. The one verse in the Qur'an which does appear to clearly teach the second coming of Jesus is this one:

And (Jesus) shall be a sign for (the coming of) hour (of Judgement). Surah 43:61

The text is somewhat briefer in the original Arabic but the interpretation of it in the English is ostensibly correct. Again Christians and Muslims differ on the manner and effect of the second coming but agree on the fact. The second coming of Jesus is one of the grandest and most extensive subjects of the prophetic texts of the Bible, but just a few quotes will suffice:

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". Matthew 24:30

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Behold he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Revelation 1:7

We can conclude by saying that the second coming of Jesus to herald the Day of Judgment is a fact upon which the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed.

It is significant also to note that many illustrious titles of Jesus in the Bible are repeated in the Qur'an. For example, he is called the Word of God in both books. The Qur'an agrees with the Bible in calling him the Messiah. Likewise he is also called a Spirit from God in the Qur'an. These titles, however, are treated in the companion booklet to this one in this series entitled 'The Titles of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible'. As we intend to show presently that the four features dealt with thus far in this booklet make Jesus especially unique in

his life and personality, it will be profitable to bear in mind, nevertheless, that the Qur'an and the Bible also give him titles which are applied to no one else.

2. THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

We have outlined four features of the life of Jesus which are taught in both the Qur'an and the Bible. What can we learn about Jesus from these features? Firstly, they reveal to us a man who was quite unique in the history of mankind. Secondly, they show that this uniqueness implies singular greatness - such as no other man possesses. Let us briefly analyze the uniqueness of Jesus in the four features we have thus far considered in this booklet.

1. **a). The Virgin-Birth.**

Being born of a virgin-woman, Jesus had an exceptional and unique beginning to his life. He is the only man in all human history who was born in this unusual way.

2. **b). The Sinlessness of Jesus.**

He alone led a sinless life. Every other man has, at some time or other, thought or done evil as the Qur'an and the Bible jointly testify. But Jesus alone led a sinless and totally pure and holy life. Not only, therefore, did his life begin exceptionally, but it was conducted in a unique way as well.

3. **c). The Ascension.**

If the life of Jesus began in unusual circumstances, it ended in an even more remarkable way. While other men return to the dust, Jesus ascended into heaven. In this he is unique as well - no other man without any change in his nature ascended to the very presence of the living God as the Qur'an and the Bible both teach. He alone could go where no angel dared to tread - to the ultimate throne of the God of glory. The Qur'an and the Bible do not teach that any other man ever did this. In this Jesus is unique as well.

4. **d). The Second Coming.**

The Christian and Muslim worlds await the return of Jesus from heaven. The Qur'an and the Bible both teach that he alone is to herald the hour of Judgment. Christians and Muslims may differ in what they expect Jesus to accomplish on his return but both in any event expect him to take complete control of all the earth with himself as Judge of all. This alone puts him head and shoulders above all other men in accomplishment and again makes him unique among men - a uniqueness which is vested in majesty and glory.

Though he has been in the highest heavens for nearly two thousand years, he will return looking not a day older than he was when he first ascended to heaven. Over all these centuries neither death nor time have been able to make any impression on him. On this the Qur'an and the Bible are agreed as well.

Of no other man in history can we read of such a phenomenal beginning and end to his life on earth. And no other man than Jesus is now awaited by Christians and Muslims - and that from heaven as well. In the light of these admitted facts we can only conclude that Jesus Christ is a remarkably unique man. No one compares with him. In his birth, his character, destiny and ultimate glory he stands head and shoulders above all other men who have ever lived on earth.

Be it noted that the uniqueness of Jesus is not the consequence of favourable circumstances, nor the result of the favour of men, but solely the effect of the special will of God who in every way alone is responsible for his eminent greatness. It is God who has made Jesus unique among men. It is by his power and will alone that we behold a man whose very being from start to finish is charged with exceptional greatness and honour. It is from heaven that his majesty originates and comes.

All this demands serious consideration. Certain questions are begged by these circumstances. Why did God vest Jesus with such uniqueness? What is implied by all these exceptional features of his life? What sort of man is

this who does not share these features with other great men but has all of them vested in himself? And Lastly - and most importantly - who indeed is this man Jesus, when these exceptional features of his life and personality demand that he cannot just be an ordinary man like all other men? The rest of this booklet will be devoted to a comparative study of the Qur'an and the Bible to find the ultimate answer to these questions.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

The unique features of the life of Jesus demand that he is more than a prophet. God has raised up many prophets who were ordinary men, who were born naturally, who died naturally, had failings common to other men, and were therefore in no way especially distinguished from other men except for the gift of prophecy and the work of God in their lives. But the virgin-birth of Jesus Christ, his sinlessness, his ascension and his second-coming demand and imply that he was not just a prophet. In the light of these unique features of his life, surely the Christian cannot be blamed for believing that he is pre-eminent in all things above all other men. Surely even the Muslim can see that, by the glorious nature of his life and destiny, there is more to him and his relationship with God than first meets the eye.

Quite obviously Jesus was not just a messenger. Whereas the Qur'an appeals to the fact that other messengers like him went before him (Surah 5.75), nevertheless in respect of his birth, life, destiny and second coming, it can hardly be said that those other messengers were like him. If Jesus was just a messenger of the same kind as the others, why did God interrupt its process of pro-creation to conceive Jesus in the womb of a virgin-woman by the power of his Spirit? Why did he lead him without blemish whatsoever in the ways of righteousness while leaving other messengers to wrong their souls occasionally? Why did God take Jesus to be with himself for all these centuries in his own glorious presence while leaving the other messengers to return to the dust whence they came? And why send him back to this world to take control of it and also choose him to be the herald of the Day of Judgment?

The suggestion that Jesus was just a messenger like all the others cannot be sustained against this wealth of evidence of his distinguished and exceptional life and honour - and particular closeness to God. While all other men have come by nature's way and gone by the way of nature, God seems to have deliberately pushed nature aside to have a direct influence and involvement in the life and destiny of Jesus Christ. God brought him into the world by having him conceived by his Spirit in the womb of a virgin-woman. God raised him to heaven to be with him in his own glorious presence for all these many centuries. God is to send him to earth again to wind up human history and herald his Judgment. It is quite obvious that God is in every way involved in this man Jesus Christ. While other men come from the dust and return to it, Jesus came from God and returned to God (John 16.28). In some way God and Jesus have a relationship that transcends that enjoyed by any other being that has ever lived.

The Qur'an admits Biblical evidence that implies that Jesus has this exceptionally intense relationship with God which correspondingly demands that he was far more than just a messenger. Does the Qur'an give us any significance of the uniqueness of Jesus and does it harmonize and reveal what it is about him that makes him so exceptional in human history? Let us see whether it does - or whether we have to turn to the Bible to find the answer we are looking for, and to discover just who the man Jesus Christ really was.

4. THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS IN THE QUR'AN.

We shall consider the four unique features of the life of Jesus as they appear in the Qur'an to discover whether we obtain any light on their significance.

a). The Virgin-Birth.

The Qur'an treats the birth of Jesus purely as an expression of God's power and declares that it is no more significant than the creation of the first man Adam. We read:

She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So it will be. Allah createth what He will. If he decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is. Surah 3:47

Lo! The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the like- ness of Adam. He created him of dust, then He said unto him: Be! and he is. Surah 3:59

The second verse does not directly refer to the virgin-birth but by comparison with the first it is quite clear that this is what the Qur'an has in mind. In both verses the Qur'an teaches that Jesus was created and that this was purely a manifestation of God's power. In the second verse we read that his creation is neither different to nor more wonderful than that of Adam.

Let us briefly consider these two points. Firstly, is the virgin-birth just an expression of God's power? That it was brought about by the power of God goes without saying but this does not explain its meaning or purpose. Surely the great act of creating the whole world out of nothing, and the other allied facts of creation (the giving of life to men, animals, and other creatures) are sufficient proofs of God's creative power. What necessity was there to give a new demonstration of this power? In the Qur'an there are many occasions where Muhammad is told that, if the people will not believe in God despite all the evidence present in creation, nor will they believe if new portents and signs come to them. (See Surah 6. 1-41, for example). So likewise the Qur'an teaches that no proof of the ultimate resurrection is needed for the unbelievers - the mere fact that God could create men out of nothing is surely proof that God can raise them from the dead (Surah 22.5). So we also consider that the creation itself is sufficient evidence of God's creative power - and if men will not believe in him despite this evidence, no latter portent will be able to make them do so. The virgin-birth of Jesus cannot just have been a manifestation of God's power. Indeed it would require only a very limited exercise of this power to cause it and there was also no visible demonstration of it. The virgin-birth could not be physically proved - there was no visible evidence of it. We accept it as a fact by faith in God's word that it did indeed so happen. But there was no way of physically proving it. Therefore we conclude that the virgin-birth could not have been an arbitrary demonstration of the power of God for the visible demonstration is entirely lacking. There must have been another reason for it.

Secondly, we must consider the suggestion in the Qur'an that the birth of Jesus is no different to the creation of Adam. We will immediately agree that, as an expression of the power of God, the virgin-birth is indeed no more wonderful than the creation of Adam. Rather it required a negligible exercise of this power in contrast to the creation of Adam, but this suggests all the more that there was some other purpose behind it.

What was the necessity for the virgin-birth of Jesus? God surely does not do such unusual things arbitrarily if they are unnecessary. He would surely only cause the virgin-birth if it were necessary to do so. Something must have required that Jesus be born in this way.

The comparison with Adam does not help us at all. Adam was created out of dust and could not have had a father or mother - it was necessary that the first man should be created without father or mother. But Jesus was born of a woman when the creative work of God had long ceased and the pro-creation of the human race had long been in existence. We can see why it was necessary for Adam to be created without father or mother - but what was the necessity for Jesus to be born of a mother alone? The comparison with Adam does not answer this question at all.

This question really demands a thorough answer when we put it in this way: why was Jesus born of a virgin - and no one else? Why should the mother of Jesus be the most eminent woman in the Qur'an and the Bible rather than some other woman? Compare these two verses:

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb". Luke 1:42

And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation. Surah 3:2

These verses unambiguously teach that Mary was the greatest woman who ever lived. Why was this? Because she was the virgin-mother of Jesus. She was the greatest among women because she mothered the greatest among men. All this demands that there was something extremely unique about her son - and that this uniqueness in some way made it necessary for Jesus to be conceived and born of a virgin-woman.

The only clue the Qur'an gives us is that the purpose of the angel's visit was to bestow on her a "faultless son". Somehow this exceptional holiness of Jesus made the virgin-birth necessary. But this only leads to the next feature that, with the others, leads up to the conclusion of the uniqueness of Jesus and does not actually reveal what that uniqueness was. But let us press on and see what light we can obtain.

b). The Sinlessness of Jesus.

Why should Jesus be the only man who was without sin among men? The Qur'an admits his sinlessness but gives us no reason for it. The fact that he was a prophet does not answer our question. Other prophets are not described in the Qur'an as faultless and quite a few are shown to be wrongdoers. But we must again ask - why was Jesus sinless and not other men? We could understand that he was only a messenger if he had one unique feature while all the other prophets had exceptional features of their own. But all these unique features are vested in one man at the expense of all the others - and that man is Jesus. Here again the Qur'an does not reveal what made Jesus so unique.

c). The Ascension of Jesus.

The Qur'an only gives one reason for the ascension of Jesus - God took him to heaven to save him from the murderous intentions of the Jews. But this hardly explains why God has elected to enjoy the presence of Jesus for nearly twenty centuries. If the sole purpose was to save him from the Jews, why did he not send him back when those who sought his life were dead? Surely God could have found more mundane way of delivering Jesus if he was just a messenger like those who went before him. This was surely a most extraordinary and drastic way of saving him from the Jews.

We have concrete support for this argument from the Bible for shortly after Jesus was born, Herod, the King of Judea, sought his life when word came to him that the long-awaited Messiah had been born in Bethlehem. Immediately an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying:

"Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him". Matthew 2:13

Joseph and Mary duly left for Egypt by night with the child. But when Herod died shortly afterwards, the angel again came to Joseph, saying:

"Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead". Matthew 2:20

Surely God could have adopted a similar procedure the second time if he intended to rescue Jesus from the Jews. We must reject the theory that Jesus was taken to heaven solely as an escape-route from the hands of the Jews. Those who sought his life perished nineteen centuries ago, but God remains pleased to keep Jesus in his presence in heaven and has done so over all these generations since he ascended from the earth.

We can only conclude that it was the express purpose of God to raise Jesus to heaven in any event and that he most certainly did not do this purely to save him from the hands of the Jews. We must again ask - why did Jesus ascend to heaven, and not some other man? (John 3.13). Why did God will, between the time of the life of Jesus

on earth and the end of time, that Jesus should reign with him in glory in the highest heavens? With all due respect we are constrained to conclude that the Qur'an gives us no answer to this question.

d). The Second-Coming.

Why has God chosen Jesus to bring the whole world under his control? Why not Muhammad? Why will he not raise another man but instead has elected to vest Jesus with another glorious office that transcends any of those given to the other messengers?

Far from answering questions like these, the Muslim world has, in our view, devoted itself to efforts to explain away the uniqueness of Jesus rather than disclose wherein it consists. This tendency to explain away the glory of Jesus rather than investigate it can only lead to the path of error.

The wonderful birth of Jesus was caused by God's direct intervention. His whole life was one of absolute communion with God. The same God vested Jesus with majesty and glory by raising him to heaven and has decreed that he will be the herald of God's final sentence on all human history. Does not this pattern demand that there is something particularly glorious about the person of Jesus to knit all these unique features together? Surely they are all meaningless if Jesus was only a prophet and a messenger from God.

These circumstances are collective evidence that there is something majestic about the man Jesus but whatever it is, the Qur'an is silent on the matter. Why is this so? The answer is found in what follows. The Qur'an is known to the Christian world not so much for what it admits about Jesus but for what it denies about him. The Qur'an denies that Jesus is the Son of God and it denies that he was crucified. In our view - and we say this solely with respect to our right to state what we believe to be true and with no desire to cause offence - the Qur'an, by denying these two striking points about Jesus, has simultaneously robbed all the unique features it concedes of their significance. We shall proceed to behold how all these unique features harmonize and find their meaning and significance in the two fundamental doctrines of Christianity - that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for our sins.

5. THE REASONS FOR THE UNIQUENESS OF JESUS.

a). Jesus is the Son of God.

The Virgin-Birth.

If Jesus is the Son of God, it is absolutely necessary that he be born of a virgin-woman if he comes in the likeness of men. To be the Son of God he must have existed from all eternity. Therefore he could not have been born of a human father if he is the Son of God, when he became man. The life of the human race is in the male seed - Jesus could not be procreated by means of a human father if he is the Son of God. Any man born of a human father must be man and man alone. Only God can be the Father of the Son of God.

This explains the necessity of the virgin-birth and gives the reason for it. At last we see the significance of the virgin-birth. The necessity for it is now realized. Jesus had to be born of a virgin-woman if he is the Son of God and accordingly existed before becoming man. The reason for the exceptional birth of Jesus is also made clear by this fact as well as the necessity for it. He was born in this unique way by the special involvement and intervention of God because he is the Son of God. This is why God has caused all other men to come into the world by natural means (including Adam who was created out of the natural realm he found himself in) but was especially involved in the birth of Jesus. All other men are made out of the same dust Adam was created out of, but Jesus was conceived solely by the Spirit of God - because he is the Son of God. This is why he had this unique beginning to his life on earth - because he himself is unique in that he is the Son of God. This is indeed what the angel told Mary when he came to explain the miraculous conception:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God". Luke 1:32,35.

The Sinlessness of Jesus.

No Christian would believe that Jesus is the Son of God if he had ever sinned against God. It is essential that he be sinless if he is the Son of God for, if the Father and the Son be one as Jesus said they are (John 10.30), the Son must always do the will of his Father. And this we always find him so doing, as it is put in the following words:

Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise". John 5:19

If he is the Son of God, he must be one with the Father. Therefore he can do nothing of his own accord, for if he did anything independently of his own accord, he would no longer be one with the Father, nor would he be doing what the Father does - so he would not be the Son of God. One who is always doing the absolute will of God cannot sin against him. So we see why it is absolutely necessary that Jesus be sinless if he is the Son of God - because the Son of God can only be doing the will of his Father at all times. So Jesus said:

"I always do what is pleasing to him". John 8:29

So we see why Jesus is the only man who is faultless and without sin. Ordinary men do things of their own accord, but the Son of God can only do the will of his Father in heaven.

The Ascension of Jesus. If Jesus had returned to dust like all other men naturally do, no Christian would believe that he is the Son of God. The Son surely must have his home in heaven. Therefore if he became man, he could not naturally go the way of all men but must ultimately return to heaven. If Jesus is the Son of God, his ascension to heaven is a necessity and also a fundamental feature required to prove the point.

We are seeing that the unique features of the life of Jesus not only, with one accord, support the belief that he is the Son of God, but are totally necessary features in his life if this belief is to be proved true. But surely it is also becoming clear that the very presence of these unique features - necessary only if he is the Son of God - imposes on our minds the realization that he is indeed the Son of God. These unique features of necessity imply that the man they point to must possess the only uniqueness that can possibly make these features necessary - he must be the Son of God.

The Qur'an to make known to our finite minds and give us some understanding of God's glory, often tells us of the throne on which God sits (Surahs 10:4, 7:54, 13:2, etc). This metaphorical language makes us aware of the royal sovereignty that God enjoys over the universe. the Bible makes the same point, but to give us a concrete understanding of the status of Jesus in heaven, says in similar language that he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God:

"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God". Acts 7:56

God accomplished his great might in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places. Ephesians 1:20

Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Hebrews 8:1

This is not to be taken hyper-literally but purely in the sense that the Qur'an speaks of the throne of God. In both the Qur'an and the Bible the expression reveals the regal authority God has over the universe and the Bible speaks of Jesus at the right hand of the throne to express the relationship and status he enjoys in heaven with God the Father.

In most kingdoms in Biblical times every person had to bow before the King on his throne - his son alone being excepted. His wife, his daughters, lords, princes, officers and subjects had to bow before him on his throne and acknowledge his rule, but the king's son did not do so - he stood or sat at the right hand of the throne. The reason for this is surely obvious - he is the heir to the throne. The father's throne is his also. This is why the Bible says Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of God and sometimes speaks of it as his throne (Hebrews 1:8 and Revelation 3:21). As a son was in those days to his father the King, so is Jesus towards his Father in heaven. He ascended to heaven to be in God's own glorious presence (as we have seen from both the Qur'an and the Bible) because he is the Son of God. The Qur'an speaks of the throne of God - the rightful place of Jesus in heaven is at the right hand of him who sits upon it.

The Second-Coming.

Who but the Son of God could bring the judgment of God? This alone explains the second coming. The Son of God, by becoming man, has become the obvious medium of the judgment of God for two reasons. Firstly, he has revealed God to men. The Qur'an only professes to reveal the will and attributes of God. Jesus claimed to reveal God himself to men. The following verses make this clear:

"All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him". Matthew 11:27

"He who sees me sees him who sent me". John 12:45

"He who has seen me has seen the Father". John 14:9

Secondly, he has brought men face-to-face with God. It is fitting, therefore, that, having become a man, the Son of God should become the medium of the judgment of God to be revealed at the last time:

"For as the Father has life in himself so he has granted the Son to have life in himself also, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man". John 5:26-27.

This alone explains the second-coming, gives a reason for it, and makes it necessary. Thus the second coming also harmonizes with the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God. He stands for God's judgment in heaven as the one who reveals God to men and, having become a man, is fitly appointed to call them to judgment.

So we see that all the unique features in the life of Jesus owe their necessity and reality to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. Indeed the fulsome existence of all these features demands the conclusion that he is the Son of God. If any one of them was lacking, Christian belief would fall to the ground. But in the Bible every crucial circumstance exists to support the doctrine that he is the Son of God.

What is fascinating, however, is that the Qur'an admits all these unique features! While denying that Jesus is the Son of God, by the features it admits, it is tacitly and unreservedly implying that he is indeed the Son of God. For there is nothing in the Qur'an on the features of the life of Jesus that can be brought as evidence against the theory that he is the Son of God. For every feature that it allows implies that he is. We can draw only one conclusion - Jesus is unique in the Qur'an and the Bible because he is the Son of God. Even though he was a man on earth, everything about him places him ultimately on the level of deity rather than on the level of humanity.

b). The Crucifixion of Jesus.

We have seen to some extent why Jesus is coming a second time to earth, but we are at this stage constrained to enquire why he ever came from his heavenly abode the first time to dwell among men. Why did the Son of God become the unique man Jesus? Whenever God wished to send a message to mankind, he raised up prophets. Why then did he send his Son? Why did the eternally holy Son of God come down to live among sinful men in a mass of corrupt humanity? The adjectives in that question give the answer. Jesus was a unique man - he came to earth because he had a unique mission to fulfill.

God had given laws, messages, covenants, warnings and exhortations to men in times past through the prophets, but none of these helped to turn the human race from its wickedness and love of sin. No matter what God sent, men continued to sin. When he told the Israelites to have no other God but himself, they promptly made a golden calf and worshiped it. All men sinned because they were sinners. Sin is an integral part of human nature - no man is free from its power. As Jesus himself said, "Every one who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8.34). Within the body of flesh that weighs the human soul down is every fountain of lust, greed, pride, envy, malice, and all manner of iniquity. From the head to the foot the human body is the breeding ground and playground of sin. Every sinful thought, word and deed has its source within man and not within the world in which he lives. It is his own evil heart that makes him stray after sinful passions. The temptations of the flesh, the love of money and the pride of life are rooted in men because sin has a vicious control within which makes it impossible for men to follow after God in sinless and perfect purity. Neither the law of God on tablets of stone nor the commands he gave through the prophets could overcome the basic tendency in us to commit sin and to follow its impulses.

Jesus came down to earth from heaven to do what the law and the prophets could not do.

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3-4.

The pure and sinless Son of God took on human flesh with all the power of God's holiness that he possessed without measure. This ensured that the coming battle between the Son of God and sin in the flesh could only result in victory for the former. Jesus came "in the likeness of sinful flesh" - that is, he took on the very thing that has been in all ages the fountainhead of sin and wickedness - the human body.

He did not conquer it from without - he entered it from within. For centuries sin had found an irresistible spring in the human body for the exercise of its designs and purposes. Jesus, as it were, met sin in its own lair. He went right into its camp and fortress. He became man and assumed a body which in all other men had fallen victim to the power of sin.

Jesus allowed that power to try its worst on him. He went into the desert and fasted for forty days and nights without any food or water until he was emaciated from hunger. The evil one fired his deadliest darts of sin at Jesus. The Spirit of God had made stones his companions. Satan tempted him to disobey God and satisfy the hunger of his flesh by turning them into loaves of bread. Jesus refused this.

God had made the wilderness his domicile - Satan offered him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment, that for which emperors of many nations have striven without success. By the power he possessed, Jesus could conquer them all. He needed only to listen to Satan as other men do rather than to his Father who had another kingdom prepared for him. Jesus duly resisted and defied this temptation as well.

God had made him the loneliest man on earth in that wilderness - Satan offered him the homage of all peoples if he would only seek their obeisance for himself alone against his Father's will. Jesus rejected this. He did not want men to honour him according to the senses of human pride such as Satan was offering him. He did not wish to be a ruler after the order of this world - a companion of kings who have achieved fame and prestige solely because they have sought the praise of men rather than the praise of God which Jesus always sought. He was not prepared to go the way of so many before him by seeking to rule the earth according to his own devices, rather than humbly submit to God in total faithfulness.

He "condemned sin in the flesh". No human body at that moment was, by its emaciation, less inclined to resist the power of sin. But Jesus destroyed the power of sin in its own lair and all that remained was to pass on the fruit of his victory to the captives of sin whom he had come to liberate.

But to do this he had to not only suffer the fullest temptation of sin but also its direst consequences. He voluntarily went to the cross to achieve this. God will vent his full wrath against sin. The human body is the only place it will be found and it was accordingly in a human body that Jesus endured on behalf of all men.

everywhere on the cross the full consequence of sin. He entered its deepest chamber when he died. Death is the worst effect of sin. Jesus drank its dregs to the last to obtain an absolute triumph over it. When he was crucified he endured the wrath of God against sin and when he died he paid its penalty once for all.

When he rose from the dead three days later, he had once for all gained a glorious and inestimable victory over God's greatest foe. When he ascended on high he sent down the Spirit of God to his disciples so that they might share the full spoils of his victory.

He had made it possible for men to be reconciled to God, to be forgiven of their sins, and to obtain power within their weak bodies to live triumphantly by the indwelling strength of the Spirit of God within them. He had made it possible for men to walk by the Spirit of life in Jesus Christ, to be fully controlled by it, and so fulfill the requirement of God's law that men should love him with all their hearts, souls and minds. He had opened the door so that all men could be delivered of their sinful tendencies and become partakers of the divine holiness and walk in the ways of righteousness.

6. THE GLORY OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE.

Jesus came into this world the first time to become like us in every respect so that he might free us from the evil that besets us. By emptying himself of the glory which he has had with the Father from all eternity, he became a man like us and looked so much like a man and nothing else during his period of voluntary condescension on earth that millions of people to this day think he was nothing more than a man. But Jesus will come a second time and this time the roles will be reversed. He will come as he really is with all his glory and the radiance of his majesty will make the sun seem like a faint flicker in comparison. As he said of his coming:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". Matthew 24:29-30.

Every other form of light will fail and pass away when he is revealed in all his resplendent glory. But as he came into the world the first time to be made like us, so he will come a second time to make all his true followers just like himself. When he appears from heaven on that day in all his glory,

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father". Matthew 13:43

Then every vestige of sin will be torn away and he will raise his own in glorious, sinless bodies. As he in his immeasurable love for sinners took all our evil deeds and sin upon himself when he died on the cross, so by his inestimable grace and love he will give us his righteousness and sinlessness in its place.

This man Jesus is unique because he is unique in his love, glory, holiness, righteousness and eternal majesty. He is the eternal Son of God and he showed us how much he loved us, and what are the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness towards us, when he died on the cross for our sins.

What will you do with this unique man Jesus? Will you fall at his feet in awesome wonder at his honour and grace, or will you fall under his feet on that Day when God's judgment is revealed and his enemies are trampled underfoot? Will you choose to believe in the Son of God and find eternal life in his name, or will you continue to reject him in his resplendent glory and the salvation he is offering you and find instead that the wrath of God rests upon you?

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name. John 20:31

THE TITLES OF JESUS IN THE Qur'an AND THE BIBLE

by
JOHN GILCHRIST

TITLES OF JESUS IN THE Qur'an

- 1- The Messiah
- 2- The Word of God
- 3- A Spirit from God

TITLES OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE

- 1- The Son of Man
- 2- The Son of God

TITLES OF JESUS IN THE Qur'an

Jesus is defined in the Qur'an as a messenger and a prophet no different nor superior to all the other messengers who went before him. The Qur'an expressly denies the Christian beliefs about Jesus that make him pre-eminent among men and it is known in the Christian world primarily for its denials that Jesus is the Son of God and that he was crucified.

Nevertheless, while the denials in the book are very emphatic, the positive teaching about the person and life of Jesus is considerably vague and indeed strangely mysterious. For much of the teaching in the Qur'an about Jesus really appears to be far more Christian than Muslim in content and emphasis. Many of the admissions it makes about the features of his life, far from supporting the bare denials of the Qur'an about his deity and the Christian belief that he is the Son of God, tend rather to strongly uphold these Christian beliefs. (Many of these features have already been thoroughly examined in "[*The Uniqueness of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Bible*](#)" in this series. In this booklet the emphasis has been placed solely on some of the titles which the Qur'an gives to Jesus).

Whereas the Qur'an concedes unique features in the life of Jesus that are not in any way adequately explained in the book, but which clearly imply that he is the Son of God and that he came to earth to die for the sins of men, so it also awards certain eminent titles to Jesus alone which are also not explained and which in no small measure also strengthen Christian belief about Jesus.

No sincere Muslim can study the teaching of the Qur'an about Jesus without honestly feeling that there is more to this man that meets the eye and that the assertion that he was no different to other messengers is not supported by the evidence the Qur'an concedes to the Bible.

Jesus is given many titles in the Qur'an but only three will be treated in this booklet. The reason for this is twofold. In the first place, the three titles referred to are applied to j alone. Secondly, all three of these titles appear in one short passage where the Qur'an bluntly denies that Jesus is deity and that he is the Son of God. This makes it possible to study the meaning of these three titles right in the very context of the basic teaching of the Qur'an that Jesus was only a messenger like those who went before him. The passage is:

"O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and his messengers and say not "Three" - Cease! it is better for you! -

Allah is only One God. Far is it removed from his transcendent majesty that He should have a son". (Surah 4:171)

As strongly as anywhere else in the Qur'an the Christian belief that Jesus is the Son of God is here denied. But in this same passage Jesus is given three titles, however, which are majestic, exalted and splendid and are of supreme importance because they are applied to Jesus alone. Let us consider them in the order in which they appear.

1. THE MESSIAH (*Al-Masih*)

Jesus alone is called the Messiah in the Qur'an. Eleven times he is given this title and occasionally he is referred to solely by this title without being referred to by name. No explanation of the title is given in the Qur'an. What is of interest, however, is that Jesus is chiefly called the Messiah in passages that are alleged to have been revealed to Muhammad at Medina after the Hijra.

The title Messiah is extremely relevant to both the Christian and Jewish religions. The Jews, in their holy scriptures, have an abundance of prophecies of one glorious Savior to come who is called the Messiah (Daniel 9:25), the anointed one, and they have long awaited his coming. At the time of Jesus this Messianic expectancy reached its peak but after the destruction of Jerusalem forty years after the ascension of Jesus this hope waned among the Jews.

To the Christians, Jesus is the promised Messiah. He said he was in no uncertain terms. (John 4:25-26) The Jews in his time could not perceive that Jesus was the Messiah because they had expected a military leader who would drive out all foreign powers from the land of the Jews and set up a kingdom in Israel which would possess world-wide authority. But the Messiah came "not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

In Hebrew the word Messiah means "the Anointed One". It can, in a lesser sense, refer to any priest or anointed leader and occasionally the expression is used in this context in the Jewish Scriptures. But it became in time a title for the one who was to come, the final herald of God's salvation, the Redeemer of the world.

Significantly the title only appears in the Qur'an after Muhammad has made some contact with the Jews and Christians of Arabia. Clearly Qur'anic use of the title is linked to Jewish and Christian beliefs about the Messiah. Therefore, we must go into Jewish expectations and Christian beliefs about the Jewish and Christian beliefs about the Messiah to find out what the title means.

At this stage, however, we must ask whether this title Messiah has any meaning that makes the one who holds the title in any way superior to the other great prophets of God. In Surah 4:171 it is said that the Messiah is "only a messenger" but to both the Jews and the Christians the Messiah is a man who is the greatest among men, one possessed of regality, majesty, excellence and splendour far above that of all other men. He is unique in his glory and there is no one to compare with him.

By offering no explanation of this title, the Qur'an is at the same time making no contest against the accepted longstanding beliefs of the Jews and Christians about the Messiah. To both he is far more than just a messenger. The title in Jewish and Christian scriptural usage clearly implies greatness of such a degree that all the true messengers of God will ultimately bow to him in homage and obeisance. By admitting the Christian contention that Jesus is the Messiah, the Qur'an is in fact implying that he is the ultimate man of glory in human history and that he is the one who is the final expression of the revelation of God to men.

Nevertheless we cannot even stop here for we find in the Bible that, to both Jews and Christians, the title Messiah is in fact synonymous with the title Son of God. In these circumstances it is rather amazing to find that the Qur'an calls Jesus the Messiah and denies that he is the Son of God in the same breath. Let us examine some of the text in the Bible that show that the expressions Messiah and Son of God are synonymous. (The word "Christ" means "Messiah" and as we have been consistently referring to the "Messiah" and have been quoting

from a Muslim translation of the Qur'an which uses the word Messiah rather than Christ which is used by other Muslim translators, we shall continue to do so).

a) Jewish believers in Jesus called him both the Messiah and the Son of God, Simon Peter was the first to do so:

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God". (Matthew 16:16)

Martha also used the two titles simultaneously in her expression of belief in Jesus.

"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world". (John 11:27)

b) The High Priest of the Jews used the titles simultaneously with one another asking Jesus if he was the Messiah.

"I adjure you, by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God". (Matthew 26:63)

c) The early Christians used the titles synonymously with one another as well in various contexts:

"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God". (Mark 1:1)

"These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name". (John 20:31)

d) Even the demons did so as well when they spoke to Jesus:

"And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!! But he rebuked them, and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Messiah". (Luke 4:41)

From these many texts we can see that the Messiah is no less than Son of God himself. This is no ordinary title - it is a title of the highest eminence and only the Son of God could exclusively claim the title of Messiah for himself according to the expectations of the Jews and the teachings of the prophets who preceded him.

By admitting that Jesus is the Messiah and by confirming his own emphatic declaration to this effect (John 4:25-26), the Qur'an has given Jesus a title which implies nothing less than that he is indeed the Son of God.

2. THE WORD OF GOD (*Kalimatullah*)

Jesus is also called "His word" in Surah 4:171, meaning the Word of God. In Surah 3:45 we also read that the angels said to Mary "Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary". More than once in the Qur'an, therefore, Jesus is called God's Word. He is also called the Word of God in the Bible.

"He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God". (Revelation 19:13)

Once again, therefore, Jesus is given a title in the Qur'an which the Bible gives him as well. Like the title Messiah this is a very distinctive and exalted title. Whether we take it in its actual Biblical form, "The Word of God", or in its actual Qur'anic forms, "a Word from God" and "God's Word", two things are strikingly and abundantly clear. Jesus *himself*, in his actual person, is the Word; and the source, origin and the fountainhead of the Word is *God*.

As with the title Messiah, the Qur'an gives no explanation of the title. Nevertheless, in seeking to reconcile it with the Qur'anic assertion that Jesus was only a messenger, Muslim commentators generally have claimed that Jesus is called the Word of God solely in accordance with the teaching in the Qur'an that he was created in the womb of a virgin-woman by the Word of God:

"She said: My Lord!! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So it will be. Allah createth what He will, if He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only; Be! and it is." (Surah 3:47)

By the single word of God "Be", it is alleged that Jesus was created and from this verse Muslim commentators have concluded that this is why Jesus is called the Word of God. It is a convenient but inadequate conclusion. According to that verse, this is how anything is created by God. But Jesus alone receives the title Word of God and its unique character must compel us to reject this theory as over-simplistic. Secondly it is exposed further as being an insufficient answer to the question of its meaning by a simple consideration of a similar statement just twelve verses later in the same Surah:

"Lo! the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam, He created him from dust, then He said unto him, Be! and he is". (Surah 3:59)

Once again it is said of Jesus that he was created by God purely through the expression "Be" but this time it is said that "the likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam", implying that *both* were made by the single word of God "Be" in the same way. If Jesus is called the Word of God purely as a result of the manner of his conception, then Adam too must be the Word of God for according to the Qur'an they were both created in the same manner. Now a real difficulty arises because Adam is not called the Word of God in the Qur'an. Nor are the angels, nor is any other creature so called in the Qur'an. Jesus alone is called the Word of God.

The very exceptional nature of the title, by which Jesus is distinguished from all other men and all creatures, demands that there is some other meaning and significance behind it. The very fact that the title is given to Jesus alone in *both* the Qur'an and the Bible clearly shows that there is something about the *person* of Jesus that makes him the Word of God in a way in which no other man or creature can compare. Jesus *himself* is called the Word of God and the title relates to his person and not to any feature or circumstance of his life.

As mentioned earlier, one of the distinctive features of this title is the emphasis of deity as the source of the person who bears it. The Word is from *God*. And the title *Word* implies that he is the communication and revelation, in his own person, of God to men. The Word of God is one who indeed is actively the real manifestation of God to men. To know him is to know God. He does not merely bring the religion and words of God to men, he himself *is* the word and revelation of God, Jesus himself made this clear when he said:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father". (John 14:9)

Let us now turn to the plain teaching of the Bible about Jesus as the Word of God. The prologue to the Gospel of John gives us a clear explanation of the title:

"In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God. And the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made". (John 1:1-3)

To emphasize strongly that Jesus himself is the Word of God and not that God's word is somehow related to him as is suggested by the major Muslim commentators, let us briefly paraphrase those two verses:

In the beginning *before* God ever began to *create*, the Word *already existed*. Far from being part of the created order, the Word was in the realm of *God* and indeed the very nature of the Word was that of *God*. When God first began to fashion the *created* order, the Word already existed in the *divine* order. He himself was *not* created but all *other* things were created by God *through* him as agent, indeed as the very Word of God. Because he alone is the Word of God, and is therefore the sole means of communication between God and his creatures, nothing was created without being created by and *through* him. (John 1:1-2)

The clear teaching of the Bible is that Jesus existed as the Word of God before God ever created anything and that he is therefore deity. But then the Word of God became the man Jesus, the son of Mary.

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth". (John 1:14)

Jesus is the Word of God not because of any intervention by God at his conception nor by any other circumstances. He always was, from all eternity, the Word of God before he took on human flesh and became the man Jesus, the son of Mary.

Every prophet of God has been a messenger but only Jesus is the Word of God. The distinction comes out in this contrast; whereas every prophet only delivered the words of God when proclaiming God's message, Jesus *at all times* spoke the words of God. In private conversation with their friends, for example, the prophets spoke their own words and we accordingly distinguish between the prophet's own words in normal conversation and the words of God which the prophets spoke at various intervals whenever bidden to do so by God. But Jesus is *the* Word of God and *every* word he spoke - whether in teaching or in private conversation - was God's work. There was no distinction between the words of Jesus and the words of God. This is abundantly clear from the teaching of Jesus himself:

"I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me". (John 12:49-50)

"The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works." (John 14:10)

The words which Jesus spoke were not the words of a man but of God. Yet because Jesus himself is the Word of God, he could quite justifiably call them his own words. This is something no other prophet could do. No one else could say that his *own* words were the words of *God*. See how Jesus speaks of his words as his own and yet also as the words of God.

"He who does not love me does not keep *my words*, and the word which you hear is *not mine* but the Father's who sent me". (John 14:24)

Again, whereas Jesus often proclaimed that nothing he said was on his own authority (as we have seen) but that every word he spoke was God's, yet because he is the Word of God he could quite rightly claim then as his own.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears *my word* and believes him sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life". (John 5:24)

"If you continue in *my word*, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free". (John 8:31)

"If I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept *my word* and have not denied my name". (Revelation 3:8)

Nevertheless not only does Jesus on every occasion speak of God's words as his own because he is the Word of God, but he himself, being himself the Word of God, is the final, ultimate and complete revelation of God to men.

"He is the *image* of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation for *in* him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities - all things were created *through* him and *for* him. He is before all things and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything he might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell". (Colossians 1:15-19)

So we see that far from being only a messenger of God, that is, one who receives an independent message from God, Jesus *himself* is the message of God and there is accordingly *no* independence between God and his Word. This is why Jesus alone is the unique Word of God. He is not a created messenger, he is the eternal Word of God. Other men are made from the dust - this man is from God. Other men return to the dust - this man returned to God.

At this stage we are constrained to say that we Christians do not really see where we are exaggerating in our religion as the Qur'an suggests in the passage under review (Surah 4:171). Because we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, we are supposedly exaggerating in our belief in him and yet, in that very same passage, the Qur'an calls Jesus the Messiah which implies fundamentally that he is the Son of God. But now we come across the title Word of God which, to all intents and purposes, is really more emphatic and suggestive of deity than the title Son of God.

The latter title at least implies some limitation and submission on the part of its bearer - a son is subject to his father - but the title Word of God implies no such limitation. By itself it clearly implies that its bearer is the express image of the invisible God and only the latter, title Son of God implies some submission on his part to the Father. The Qur'an denounces Christians for believing that Jesus is the Son of God and yet, in the very same breath, gives him the title Word of God which is as indicative of deity on the title Son of God. There is really no meaningful difference between the titles. Quite where we are exaggerating in our religion is not at all clear to us! So we see that the first two titles in Surah 4:171 that we have considered, i.e. Messiah and Word of God far from supporting the suggestion that Jesus is "only a messenger", in fact heavily reinforce the Christian belief that Jesus is the Word and Son of God incarnate. But let us press on now to the third title in Surah 4:171.

3. A SPIRIT FROM GOD (*Ruhullah*).

This third title is very little different from the second one for once again the title belongs to Jesus alone and God again is the source of the Spirit as he was the source of the Word. (It is sometimes said of Adam that God breathed something of his spirit into him but this must be carefully distinguished from the title Spirit of God which is given to Jesus alone.) Jesus is *his* Word and *his* Spirit. This title is also not explained in the Qur'an but frankly supports the Christian belief that Jesus was not a creature made out of dust but an eternal spirit who took on human form.

In this case, however, we do find some evidence in the Qur'an that helps us to identify the meaning of this title. Elsewhere in the Qur'an we read of the "Holy Spirit" (*Ruhul-Quds* - cf. Surahs 2:87, 2:253, 16:102) and it is presumed that the Holy Spirit is the angel Gabriel. Whoever it is, it is generally agreed that the Holy Spirit is greater than man and comes from heaven and is purely a spirit.

Jesus, however, is now called "a Spirit from him" (*ruhun-minhu*) from which he has received the title in Islamic traditions "Spirit of God" (*Ruhullah*). The expression in Surah 4:171, *ruhun-minhu* ("a spirit from him") is used in exactly the same form in Surah 58:22 where it is said that God strengthens true believers with "a spirit from him". Very significantly Yusuf Ali, commenting on this latter verse in his translation of the Qur'an states that here the "phrase used is stronger" than that for the Holy Spirit (*Ruhul Quds*). He implies that the Spirit from God is greater than the Holy Spirit and says that it is "the divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of God" (note 5365).

This is a remarkable comment which is clearly a veiled implication that the *ruhun-minhu* is the very Spirit of the living God, uncreated and eternal in essence. Yusuf Ali says it is "the divine spirit" and that it is as incomprehensible as God himself. This language is unambiguous - the Spirit from God is clearly believed by him to be from the realm of deity and not from the created order. He is, according to this interpretation, practically synonymous with the Holy Spirit in the Christian Bible.

Now this is the very title that the Qur'an gives to *Jesus* in Surah 4:171. The exact same words are used - *he* is the *ruhun-minhu*, "a Spirit from God". If we merely apply Yusuf Ali's interpretation of the expression in Surah 58:22 to the very same expression given as a title to Jesus in Surah 4:171, we can only conclude that *Jesus* is the "divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of God". He is, therefore, God in essence and nature. Because of the simultaneous denial in 4:171 that Jesus is the Son of God, Yusuf Ali is constrained to deny that the title *ruhun-minhu* when applied to Jesus implies deity, but he is hardly consistent in his exposition of the Qur'an when he teaches in another place that *ruhun-minhu* is indeed a *divine* spirit possessing the nature and attributes of God and is as incomprehensible as God as well.

For our part we believe that, as with the titles Messiah and Word of God, this title Spirit of God also strongly supports the Christian belief that Jesus is indeed the Son of God and that, not in any metaphorical sense, but in an eternal one which is based on the fact that he is very deity himself. The only way Yusuf Ali could avoid this admission when commenting on Surah 4:171 was to frankly contradict what he said in his commentary on Surah 58:22.

Nevertheless all three of these titles not only support but plainly imply that the one they refer to is the Son of God. In the Bible this is clearly the case and in the Qur'an the lack of an explanation for each title, together with the fact that the titles are much the same as those in the Bible, and further together with the underlying implication of each title by itself, leaves us with no other alternative but to conclude that Jesus is indeed the exalted figure that the Bible reveals him to be.

We have concluded our study of the most significant titles of Jesus in the Qur'an. Let us now turn to the Bible and let us briefly examine the two most significant titles of Jesus in this book - Son of Man and Son of God. We are selecting these titles, not simply because the Bible gives them to Jesus, but because these are the two titles which Jesus used of himself more often than any other in describing himself and his mission and ministry on earth.

TITLES OF JESUS IN THE BIBLE

The Bible gives Jesus many magnificent titles. He is given the titles Savior of the World, King of Kings, Redeemer, The Lord our Righteousness, the Sun of Righteousness, among many others which, when combined with one another, leave the unmistakable impression that he is indeed the Lord of Glory.

We will now consider, however, the two titles Jesus used of himself more than any other, the Son of Man and the Son of God. Indeed from these two titles, we can gain a sufficient impression of the whole person and work of Jesus Christ.

4.THE SON OF MAN

In the Bible the title Son of Man is undoubtedly one of the most important titles of Jesus for he used this title of himself more than any other during his ministry. It is in fact the first title we find him using of himself. He addressed his new disciple Nathaniel in these words:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man". (John 1:51)

Not only is this the first title of Jesus in the Gospels, it is also the last title he used for himself during his earthly life. When he was arraigned before the Jewish High Priest on the last night he was alive, he said to him:

"Hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven". (Matthew 26:64)

Quite obviously this title was a very important and distinctive one to Jesus. But what does it mean? Is it simply a way of expressing the humanity of Jesus? That Jesus was a man is disputed by neither Christian nor Muslim in this world. But the title Son of Man cannot just be an expression of humanity. The definite form of the title, *the* Son of Man, refers to more than this and clearly implies that it is a unique man who bears this title and that in some exceptional way he is the figurehead of the human race.

Secondly one might be tempted to say that if Jesus so often called himself the Son of Man, was he not perhaps contrasting himself with the beliefs of some who followed him who held that he was the Son of God? Was not this his way of emphasizing his humanity over and against the assertions of others that he was the Son of God?

On the contrary, no fair exposition of the Bible can allow this interpretation at all. Firstly Jesus never used the title Son of Man in a context where it is contrasted with the title Son of God. Secondly it is only in the four

Gospels in the Christian Bible that these two titles Son of Man and Son of God are found and as the writers quoted Jesus as using both titles for himself, we cannot imagine that they would have done this if the title s of Man was in any way contrary to the title Son of God.

We discover the meaning and import of the title Son of Man from a prophetic passage in the Book of Daniel where the prophet describes a vision he saw many centuries before Jesus was born. He was given A vision of heaven where God is and saw all the nations of earth gathered before him. Then in the night he saw this great even happen.

"Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was give dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed". (Daniel 7:13-14)

The Son of Man is an apocalyptic figure who is able to come right into the presence of God and it is to him that God gives authority over all the powers of the universe that every creature in heaven and on earth should serve him. Quite obviously the Son of Man is a glorious person, the epitome of human perfection and honour. And it is in this context that we find Jesus calling himself the Son of Man.

Elsewhere in the Bible we find the expression Son of Man used in a lesser sense (Psalm 8:4, Job 25:6, Ezekiel 11:15) where it does not refer to Jesus but is used in a general sense denoting humanity. Nevertheless whenever Jesus used it of himself, he used it as a *title* which belonged to him *alone*. In an exclusive sense he is the ultimate Son of Man, the one who was beheld by Daniel in all his glory in the vision he was allowed to receive, one who is unique and pre-eminent among men. The Son of Man, through something he head done and achieved as a man, was entitled to enter the presence of God and become the heir to the kingdom God has prepared for all those who truly love him.

What the Son of Man had done was to die for the sins of the world. By reconciling men to God, he was entitled to receive the kingdom which he had now made accessible to all who draw near to God through him. By conquering sin he had become the sovereign over those he set free from its power.

For this reason we invariably find Jesus using the title Son of Man in respect of his crucifixion and the glory he was to receive subsequent to it. He often told the Jews that it was the destiny of the Son of Man to be "lifted up", an expression which implied firstly that he was to be lifted up on a cross as an object of scorn before all men as he took their sins on himself and, secondly, that he was thereafter to be lifted up by God to glory in heaven to reign with him in wondrous majesty over all the sons of men. (See John 3:14-15, 8:28, 12:32-34.)

To his closer circle of disciples Jesus made this even clearer. On the last night before he was to be crucified, when he knew that Judas was about to betray him into the hands of the Jews, he said:

"The Son of Man goes as it is written of him". (Matthew 26:24)

As many of the prophets of old had foretold (e.g. Psalm 22, Psalm 69, Isaiah 53), the Son of Man was to die for the sins of men to make atonement for them. Only two days earlier Jesus had said to his disciples:

"You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified". (Matthew 26:2)

On numerous other occasions Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man in the context of a lowly man on earth serving his fellow men finally laying down his life for them - much the same as the concept of the son of man in a general sense where the expression is used, not only to imply humanity, but to imply lowly humanity and human weakness. The Lord of all glory had voluntarily taken on the form of a servant and had in deep humility elected not only to serve God in form of a creature but even to serve his fellow-men:

"The Son of Man came, not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". (Matthew 20:28)

But far from the pending crucifixion being a final humiliation, Jesus spoke of it as a means of being glorified. More than once he spoke of his hour of destiny on the cross on the hour of glory for him. Shortly before his crucifixion he said to his disciples:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit". (John 12:23-24)

Again, as he began his last discourse to his disciples after Judas departed, he said:

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and in him God is glorified. If God is glorified in him, he will glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once". (John 13:31-32)

Far from the crucifixion being a disgrace for Jesus or even a triumph for his enemies, it was merely a means to that ultimate glory which the Son of Man was to receive in heaven according to the vision which Daniel saw many centuries earlier. He went to the cross to redeem thousands of sinners so that he could ultimately lead them in triumph into the kingdom which God was to give him. Three days after he had died on the cross, God raised him for the dread and forty days later God lifted him up and raised him to glory in the heavens until he should return to receive his own and lead and rule over them in the kingdom of heaven for evermore.

Accordingly we often find Jesus speaking of himself as the Son of Man in the context of glory as well as in the context of crucifixion. We only have to refer to the two texts quoted of the beginning of this section to see how emphatically Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man in the context of heavenly honour and majesty.

In the first quote he said to Nathaniel "You will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" and to the High Priest he said "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven". One day all men will see the Son of Man coming from heaven with the glory he had already obtained in the kingdom of God. Other quotes in the same context are these:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne". (Matthew 25:31)

"Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory". (Matthew 24:30)

In all these quotes we find a deeply significant trend. The Son of Man is the central figure in the kingdom of heaven. He is unique among men - not just one who has found his way into heaven, but the one who is the focal point of glory before the eyes of all men and all angels of the highest place that heaven affords, at the right hand of the throne of God.

After Jesus had ascended to heaven, we have a wonderful example of a vision granted to one of the early Christians, Stephen, who was about to die for his Master and so became the first Christian martyr. As Daniel had seen a vision of the ultimate honour of the Son of Man in heaven, so Stephen also received a similar vision as he was about to die, and said:

"Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God". (Acts 7:56)

So we see the pattern of the life of the Son of Man - from apparent disrepute at the hands of sinful men as he died for them on the cross to transparent honour and glory at the hand of God when he raised him from the dead to sit at his right hand, there to receive the kingdom he had rightly earned for all who are saved by faith in him.

So we see what a glorious personality the Son of Man is. Far from being a simple expression of humanity, the Son of Man is a title given only to the ultimate Redeemer of the earth and all who follow him. But if the Son of Man has gone to sit at the right hand of the throne of God, we are constrained to ask - does not this lead us to consider that the title "Son of Man", far from contrasting with the title "Son of God", rather corresponds to and is wedded to it? While the title implies humanity, do not the circumstances that Jesus spoke of which are found to

accompany the ministry and work of the Son of Man imply that he is also in very truth the Son of God and that the Son of Man possesses divinity as well as humanity? Let us press on to see how the Jews themselves got this very impression - and then let us conclude with a very brief examination of this title Son of God which Jesus also gave himself.

5. THE SON OF GOD

At the time of Jesus the Jewish people failed generally to believe in him and to follow him but despite this they did not fail to grasp his claims about himself. When Jesus stood before the Council on the last night before he died, he said "From now on the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22:69), to which the Jews promptly replied "Are you the Son of God, then?" (v. 70) Although he had called himself the Son of Man, what he had said about the Son of Man seemed to imply that he was also the Son of God. Jesus answered "You say that I am", meaning, "Indeed what you have said is true - I am the Son of God - and *you* have borne witness to the fact".

Likewise we find a similar answer from Jesus when the High Priest said to him, "I adjure you, by the living God, tell us whether you are the Messiah, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus answered "I am - and you have said so" (Mark 14:62, Matthew 26:64). To this answer the High Priest exclaimed "He has uttered blasphemy" (Matthew 26:65).

Jesus had been arrested by the Jews on the order of the High Priest because he had learnt that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. At his trial no evidence could be brought which could be made to stick against Jesus, so the High Priest stood up and asked him the one question that was on his heart. "Are you, the Son of God?" The question was as unambiguous and as plain as it could be - and Jesus was put on oath before God to give him the true answer. Jesus replied in equally obvious language: "I am".

Not only did he confirm without reserve that he was the Son of God but he did so in the full knowledge of the consequences - that he would immediately be sentenced to death for blasphemy by the unbelieving Jews.

This was the climax of the growing hostility of the Jews to Jesus because of his repeated assertions that he was the Son of God. When they were angry with him for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus answered:

"My Father is working still, and I am working". (John 5:17)

As a result of this claim they sought all the more to kill him because he made himself the Son of God by calling God his Father and by unreservedly equating his work with the Father's work.

On another occasion Jesus again incurred the wrath of the Jews for saying "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). They did not except to his claim to pre-exist Abraham but were struck by the present tense, "*I am*", which implied that he had an eternal spirit. To them this was the equivalent of God's statement to Moses "*I am* the God of Abraham" (Exodus 3:6). So they took up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

A third time Jesus said to them "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30) - an emphatic statement that God was his Father and that he existed in absolute unity with him - and was therefore the Son of God. Again the Jews took up stones to stone him for blasphemy.

Now their own scriptures confirmed that the expression "Sons of the Most High" faith was used metaphorically of all true believers (Psalm 82:6). Why then were they accusing him of blasphemy because he claimed to be the Son of God in an absolute sense? (He at no time took exception to their conclusion - he reacted solely against their charge that he was *falsely* claiming to be the Son of God). His own words were:

"Do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world 'You are blaspheming' because I said '*I am the Son of God*'?". (John 10:36)

For two reasons the Jews could not validly accuse him of blasphemy. Firstly, they could not genuinely object to terminology like "I am the Son of God" because their own scriptures used such terminology only in a

metaphorical sense while Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God in an absolute sense, they still could not sincerely charge him with falsehood because the good works he did from the Father showed that his claims for himself were equally good and that this proved that he was indeed the Son of God.

All this had come to the ears of the High Priest and to avoid any further dispute, he put Jesus on oath to say whether he was indeed the Son of God to which Jesus replied "I am". The Jews then promptly went to the Roman governor, Pilate, seeking the execution of Jesus - for only one reason: *Jesus* claimed to be the *Son of God*. The Jews said to Pilate:

"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God". (John 19:7)

Once they thought they had succeeded in their designs, when Jesus hung on the cross, they exclaimed:

"He trusts in God, let God deliver him now, if he desires him, for he said '*I am the Son of God*'" (Matthew 27:43)

It is of great importance to observe the thrust of the accusation of the Jews against him - "*he* has made *himself* the Son of God"; "*he* said '*I am the Son of God*'". While many men since that day have accused the Christian church of making Jesus the Son of God, the Jews heard it from his own lips - and they accused *him* of making *himself* the Son of God. Jesus made no attempt to deny this charge. So we see that Jesus himself is the source of Christian belief that he is indeed the Son of God.

Just as the expression "son of man" is found elsewhere in the Bible in a general sense, so is the expression "sons of God", but just as Jesus took the title Son of Man for himself in an exclusive and glorious sense as a majestic title, so he claimed to be the Son of God in the same exclusive sense.

No one can honestly doubt that Jesus himself claimed to be the Son of God. Only one question remains, however, - was he indeed speaking the truth when he made this claim for himself or was he uttering blasphemy as the High Priest alleged?

In three definite ways God bore witness to the truth of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. When he promised the Jews centuries earlier that the Messiah was to come from David's line, God said of him:

"I will be his father and he shall be *my* son". (2 Samuel 7:14)

God made it clear that the Messiah was to be his *own* Son and this prompted Jesus to say to the Jews at the end of his ministry among them:

"What do you think of the Messiah ? Whose son is he?" (Matthew 22:42)

When the Jews replied that he was to be the Son of David, Jesus pointed to a Psalm where David called him his Lord. How then could he be *his* son, Jesus asked? The Messiah was to be the offspring of David but had not God said that he would be *his* own Son? Secondly, God spoke from heaven of Jesus at his baptism, and later again, at his transfiguration and said:

"This is *my* beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased". (Matthew 3:17)

Thirdly, Jesus was raised from the dead three days after his crucifixion according to his own predictions to this effect (Matthew 16:21, etc.). In this way God bore witness to the fact that everything Jesus said about himself was true - including his oft-repeated claim to be the Son of God. His resurrection proved beyond shadow of doubt that he was indeed the Son of God (Romans 1:4) and that God was truly his Father.

It was the express united will of both the Father and the Son that Jesus should die as a man on a cross to redeem men to God. Perhaps the Father was never less obviously revealed in the Son than during those hours when Jesus hung, forsaken of his Father, on the cross as he took the sins of men on himself. But never was the

absolute and awesome love of the Father and the Son more revealed to hell-deserving sinners than during those moments when Jesus endured what is rightfully due to all other men for their sins.

You must answer this question as well - what do *you* think of the Messiah? Whose Son is he? Will you agree with God and testify that Jesus, the Messiah, is indeed *his* Son? Will you not commit yourself to Jesus as your Lord and Saviour and receive the salvation he obtained for you by dying on the cross for your sins? Will you not believe in him fully and recognise that eternal life is found in him alone? Will you not receive forgiveness of sins in his name?

Millat-A-Ibrahim: The True Faith of Abraham

by John Gilchrist

There are many similarities between the three great monotheistic religions in the world, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Not only do they all confess the existence of one Supreme Being only, but they place the revelation of his will and the development of prophetic history against the same background. All three teach that God created the world in six days, that the first man created was Adam and that Eve (Hawwa) was his wife, that men have sinned against God and need his forgiveness, that God has sent a series of prophets into the world (such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc.), and that there will be a Day of Judgement for the vindication of the righteous and the destruction of the ungodly.

Yet the same three religions have marked differences, so radical and so crucial that there is ultimately no prospect of reconciliation between them. Each looks to a respective founder - Judaism to Moses, Christianity to Jesus, and Islam to Muhammad - and the former faiths are not prepared to acknowledge the founders of the religions that succeeded them. The result has been much dispute and debate about the two great authors of the world's two universal monotheistic faiths, Christianity and Islam. An objective approach to all three religions must lead to the conclusion that the true religion is somewhere among these three, but which one is it?

An open mind, aided by the guidance of God, can no doubt discover the one true religion, but as there is so much debate and dispute between the three major faiths, especially over the personalities of Jesus and Muhammad, perhaps it is better to look towards one of the great prophets who preceded all three religions and about whom all three are generally in agreement, namely the patriarch Abraham. Although he was not the founder of any of those three, yet he is openly regarded by all of them as a true prophet and an example of a man of true faith, a prototype of the fuller revelation of God's truth yet to come through his antitype.

It is indeed fascinating to discover that all three monotheistic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, acknowledge that Abraham was a central, and yet unique figure in the matter of God's revelation of his truth to the human race. In fact there are three major points relating to Abraham where the major monotheistic religions all agree and, in the circumstances, it can be presumed that these points of agreement are based on a foundation of truth common to each one. The religion and faith of Abraham therefore, called in the Qur'an millat-Ibrahim (Surah 2.130), is commonly acknowledged to be the true one. All three religions can openly testify that these words express a conviction cherished and recognised by each one in turn:

Say: Follow the religion of Abraham the upright, for he was not one of the Pagans. Surah 3.95

It is thus agreed that "the religion of Abraham" (millat-a-Ibrahim) was indeed the true one and that he foreshadowed a greater revelation of it yet to come. But which one was it? We all agree in principle that he was a man of true faith, but which faith did he represent, Judaism, Christianity or Islam? Let us proceed to analyse the three points of agreement referred to and press on from there to study the implications of each, for if we can truly discover what Abraham's faith really was, we can settle the whole issue between us and duly discover God's true final revelation to mankind. By establishing a foundation of truth based on those facets of Abraham's

life and faith upon which we agree, we can build until we come to a realisation of what the true religion of Abraham really was and on what grounds he was found pleasing and acceptable to God.

1. ABRAHAM - THE FRIEND OF GOD.

Our first point of agreement relates to a title given to Abraham which is found in all three of the sacred scriptures of each respective religion, namely the close Friend of God. In the Jewish Scriptures, the Tawraat (which Christians commonly call the Old Testament), he is twice so described. On one occasion the upright king of Judea, Jehoshaphat, prayed to God in these words:

"Didst thou not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and give it for ever to the descendants of Abraham thy friend?" 2 Chronicles 20.7

In another very similar passage we find that God himself spoke from heaven and openly acknowledged that Abraham was his friend:

"You, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend". Isaiah 41.8

The Jews, therefore, have always believed that Abraham was not just a servant of God but also his friend, meaning that a very intimate relationship existed between them and that God was willing to communicate with him on a far more familiar level than that of master to servant.

In the Christian Scriptures, the Injil (which Christians commonly call the New Testament), we find that Abraham is again described and recognised as the friend of God. The verse reads:

The scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God. James 2.23

Significantly Islam also recognises that Abraham was, in a special way, the friend of God. Whereas Muhammad is called in Islam the "messenger of God" (rasulullah), and David is called the "vicegerent of God" (khalifatullah), with Moses being designated the "word of God" (kalimatullah) and Jesus the "spirit of God" (ruhullah), so in turn the specific title given to Abraham in Islam is the "friend of God" (kalilullah). The title duly appears in the following verse of the Muslim Scriptures, the Qur'an:

For God did take Abraham for a friend. Surah 4.125

Just as Judaism and Christianity therefore acknowledge him to be the friend of God, so the Qur'an states explicitly that the great prophet Ibrahim was duly taken by Allah to be his very own friend, his khalil.

What is the implication of this title? Clearly it has a very special significance. It obviously implies that Abraham was not just a willing servant of God to whom God gave commands which the prophet summarily obeyed, nor was he purely a prophet to whom God dictated re-velations through the medium of an angel. He had a very close relationship with God, so close and so intimate that God was willing to confide in him, share his secrets with him, and even trust himself to him. A common bond of loyalty and mutual trust clearly existed between them, for this is the true meaning of friendship. A beautiful example of the distinction between a servant and a friend was given by Jesus Christ when he said:

"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you". John 15.15

In the same way we must presume that if God was willing to take Abraham as his friend, this means that he was willing to confide in him and let him know many of his deepest counsels and purposes that he would not otherwise reveal to someone who was only his servant. We must conclude, therefore, that in a unique way God revealed to Abraham his plans and decrees for the future, confiding in him as a loyal and trusted friend who would believe in his revelations and faithfully and loyally preserve them for the generations to come.

Our study of the first point of agreement between Judaism, Christianity and Islam relating to the prophetic office of the great patriarch Abraham, therefore, has laid a sure foundation on which to build and from which we can explore the nature of his relationship to God. Before doing so, however, let us proceed to analyse the other two points of agreement so that the foundation may first be completed.

2. THE FATHER OF ALL TRUE BELIEVERS.

The second great point of agreement between the three great monotheistic religions is that Abraham is respected as the head of all the faithful and the father of all true believers. In the Jewish Scriptures it is recorded that God said to Abraham:

"I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing". Genesis 12.2

On two other occasions God renewed this promise, adding that he would be the father of a great multitude whom no man could number:

"I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted". Genesis 13.16

"I have made you the father of a multitude of nations". Genesis 17.5

God later confirmed that his covenant would be made, not through his son Ishmael who was born of a slave woman, Hagar, but through Isaac who was born of his wife Sarah (Genesis 17.19). As a result the Jews, who were all descended from Abraham through Isaac, looked on him as the father of their nation and regarded themselves as his true offspring and the nation that had been promised to him. Furthermore, because they also considered themselves the only nation on earth who were the true people of God, they accordingly saw him also as the father of all true believers.

Christians likewise regard Abraham as the father of all true believers, but we do not believe that the promises made to him referred ultimately to his physical offspring, the Jews, but rather to his spiritual offspring, that is, all those who have the same kind of faith that Abraham had. Indeed, in our view, the very choice of Isaac as the son through whom the covenant God had made with Abraham was to be fulfilled, shows that God was not thinking of his physical offspring. If he had, he would have chosen Ishmael, the first son born to Abraham, but he chose Isaac to show that he intended the blessings of the covenant to become effective for those who were spiritual and true in faith towards him. For it is recorded in both the Jewish Scriptures (Genesis 16. 12) and the Christian Scriptures (Galatians 4.29) that Ishmael was a decidedly unspiritual man (one born of "the flesh" as opposed to Isaac who was born of "the Spirit") and God therefore overlooked him in favour of Isaac to show that the true beneficiaries of his promises would not be those who would bear Abraham's genetic image in their flesh but rather those who would emulate his faithful character in their spirits. As it is put in the Christian Scriptures:

Not all are children of Abraham because they are his descendants; but "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named". This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants. Romans 9. 7-8.

So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham ... So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. Galatians 3. 7,9.

To us Abraham was accepted by God because he had faith in God and accordingly he became the father of the faithful. As the moon reflects the sun's light, so Abraham in his faith reflected the faithfulness of God. As the sun generates light, so God generates faithfulness and trustworthiness. Abraham responded to this by trusting God and by having faith in him (as we shall see in greater detail shortly). Therefore, just as God is the true Father of all true believers, so Abraham became a reflection of his leadership and was told, "I have made you the father of many nations" (Romans 4.17).

In our view, too, because this promise was made in the plural ("a multitude of nations - Genesis 17.5), it means that Abraham is not only the father of all true believers in Israel but also of all those in every nation who follow the example of his faith. It is therefore said in our Scriptures that the promise was made to all "those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all" (Romans 4.16).

Just as the Jews believe, therefore, that Abraham was really a Jew and the father of the Jewish nation, so we believe that he was really a Christian at heart because he had the same kind of faith of which all true Christians are made - not in self-righteous piety through the performance of religious works and good deeds, but in a God-given righteousness by faith in a God who is faithful (1 Corinthians 10.13). We believe he was accepted and appointed as the father of all true believers, not because he had a righteousness which he had in himself, but because he had faith in God's own righteousness and faithfulness. He trusted not in works of law which he performed but in the grace of God towards all who respond to him in true faith. Islam also appoints Abraham as the representative of all true believers on earth. According to the Qur'an he was made an imam, a "faithful leader" for the whole human race. The Qur'an states that Allah said to him:

"Lo, I have appointed you a leader for mankind". Surah 2.124

Islam follows Christianity in regarding him, not as a father of one particular nation, but as the father of all true believers. He is regarded as the head because his belief and creed is regarded as the true one. On the other hand, whereas Christianity marks him out for his faith in God's faithfulness, Islam credits him for his belief in the oneness of God against the polytheism of his day (Surah 21. 66-67) and for his submission to the will of God (Surah 2.131). We shall go into this in greater detail as well in the next section, but at this stage it is important to note that as Judaism and Christianity regard him as a true Jew and Christian respectively, so the Qur'an, honouring his submission to God, calls him a muslim (Surah 3.67), saying of him that he was *haiifaam-muslimaan* - "an upright Muslim" or, more literally, one who was righteous and submissive. Once again his belief in the unity of God (*tauhid*) is also emphasised as both titles, *hanif* and *muslim*, are used for monotheists in the Qur'an in contrast with unbelievers (*kafirun*) and idol-worshippers (*mushrikin*).

Abraham, as a true Muslim therefore, is regarded in Islam as the imam of all true Muslims and the Qur'an, therefore, again and again exhorts Muslims: *faattabi'uu millata Ibrahim* - "follow the faith of Abraham", alternatively, follow his creed or form of religion. The true faith that Abraham had, therefore, is called in the Qur'an the *millata-Ibrahim* and this very faith is set before all Muslims as the kind of faith they should emulate. We have now considered two of the great points of agreement between Judaism, Christianity and Islam on the prophetic character of Abraham and shall now analyse the third.

3. AN EXAMPLE AND PROTOTYPE OF THE TRUE RELIGION TO COME.

Although all three religions look to Abraham as a leader and the father of all true believers, none regards him as its founder or its most prominent figurehead but sees him solely as a prototype and example of what was yet to come. This is the third great point of agreement between Judaism, Christianity and Islam regarding Abraham's prophetic office.

In Judaism, Moses has always been regarded as the true founder of the religion of the people of Israel for it was to him that God's law was given. All the religious books of Judaism, including its Scripture and its traditional works (such as the Mishnah) distinguish him above all the other prophets of God. Some strictly orthodox Jews once summed it up when they said "We are disciples of Moses" (John 9.28). Jesus Christ himself also spoke to the Jews of Moses as "him on whom you set your hope" (John 5.45). The place Moses has in Judaism is well summed up in this description of Jewish worship:

For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in their synagogues. Acts 15.21

Christianity likewise looks to another man of God as its founder and central figure, namely Jesus Christ. Although Abraham is highly respected and honoured as a fine example of true faith, Jesus is the real founder of Christianity and its ultimate patron. Christians view the faith of Abraham as symbolic of their own faith in Jesus

Christ, both being based on an implicit trust in the revealed faithfulness of God rather than any merit in the life and works of the believer. In our view the covenant God made with Abraham was precisely a shadow of the real covenant to come. God said to Abraham:

"Surely I will bless and multiply you". Hebrews 6.14

The covenant which God later made with Moses, a covenant of law, was based on commands which placed the responsibility of compliance squarely on the shoulders of those with whom it was made, namely, "You shall be holy, you shall keep my commandments, you shall be careful to observe my statutes" and, negatively, "You shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery", etc. These were the kinds of commandments God gave to the people of Israel. But to Abraham God said simply, "I will bless you". This was not the "you shall ... you shall not" of the Mosaic Law. God, when making promises to Abraham, said "I will bless you ... I will make your name great", etc., thereby holding himself responsible for the fulfilment of the covenant he made with him. Abraham's part was to trust in God and to believe that he would do what he had promised.

In this way we see Abraham's faith in God as an example of a true Christian's faith in Jesus Christ. We trust in the promise God made to send a Saviour, we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and we are saved by God's grace through the great work of salvation he wrought through his crucifixion and resurrection. Abraham's faith is well described in this outline of his trust in God that he would duly receive the son which God had promised to him:

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Romans 4. 20-21.

Here we find what really commended Abraham to God, not his good deeds or religious works, but his faith that God would fulfil his promise. It was because he so trusted God that "his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4.22). In this he was an example of true Christian faith which depends on God's grace in sending his Son to save us from our sins just as he had promised through the prophets who came before him. So our Scriptures say that as Abraham was declared righteous by God because he trusted in him, so we too will be equally regarded if we place all our confidence and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

But the words, "it was reckoned to him", were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4.23-25.

Abraham did not try to gain God's favour through his own piety or self-righteousness - he put all his confidence in God's grace and faithfulness. He is thus an example of true Christian faith for we likewise do not seek our own glory but trust in what God has done in Jesus Christ. This helps, furthermore, to give the title "the friend of God" more meaning. The marks of friendship are trust, loyalty and a close personal relationship. Abraham was not commended for any good work but was regarded for what he was. God took him as a friend.

His good standing depended not on some form of individual righteousness by which he gained God's favour, but a personal relationship based on mutual friendship. This is precisely what true Christian faith is. All true Christians are declared in the Christian Scriptures to be "children of God" (1 John 3.1), people who have a personal relationship with their Father in heaven. Through faith in Jesus we too enter into the same covenant of grace, faith and the promises of God which characterised God's relationship with Abraham. So we read in this passage of our identification with Abraham in a covenant based on faith in the promises of God:

That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3.14

In Islam we likewise find that the central figure is not Abraham, even though he was declared to be an imam for mankind. Muhammad, proclaimed in Islam as the last and greatest of God's prophets, is the ultimate founder and figurehead of the religion. Yet, as with Judaism and Christianity, Abraham's own faith is set forth as a good example of true Muslim faith and in the Qur'an Muslims are bidden:

Say, we follow the faith of Abraham the upright. Surah 2.135

Once again Abraham is regarded as an example of true faith and the Qur'an thus highly commends the millata-Ibrahim, the "faith of Abraham". Yet, as pointed out already, there is a clear distinction between Christian and Muslim views of what Abraham's faith really was. Islam determines it principally as submission to the oneness of God. The Qur'an thus summarises his faith as follows:

Behold! His Lord said to him, "Submit". He said, "I have submitted to the Lord of the Worlds". Surah 2.131

The very word *fs/am* means submission and a Muslim is one who submits to God. Both words come from the same root letters. In Surah 2.130 we again read that the true faith of a Muslim is the *millata-Ibrahim*, the "faith of Abraham", and in the verse quoted it is defined in the command of God, *Aslim!* ("Submit") and the reply of Abraham, *Aslamtu* ("I have submitted"). The two words are also from the same root letters as the first two and in the next verse (Surah 2.132) we read that Abraham exhorted his sons to die purely as *muslimuun* - "those who have submitted". In another passage Muhammad himself is bidden to proclaim that the religion he has been commanded to follow and preach is nothing less than that which Abraham himself followed. He was bidden to say to all who questioned the source of his religion:

Say: "Verily, my Lord has guided me into a straight path, an upright religion, the faith of Abraham the upright who was not one of the idolaters". Surah 2.161

Here the *Siratal-Mustaqim* the "Straight Path" defined in the *Suratul-Fatihah* as the religion of all true Muslims, is regarded as synonymous with the *millata-Ibrahim*, the "faith of Abraham".

There are differences between Judaism and Christianity as well as Islam regarding the nature of Abraham's faith. Both Christianity and Islam agree that he believed in the one God and that he submitted to his will, yet Christianity explores a characteristic of his faith that obtains no mention in the Qur'an, namely his implicit trust in God's faithfulness. As we proceed we shall see what the implications of this distinction are, but at this stage it will be useful to summarise as the foundation we sought to lay through our analysis of the common ground between our respective faiths is now complete. All three agree that Abraham was the friend of God, that he is the head of all true believers, and that he was an example and prototype of the true religion which was to be revealed later in all its fullness through another figurehead yet to rise upon the earth. Let us press on to discover what that religion, that which the Qur'an calls the *millata-Ibrahim*, really was.

4. THE PROMISE OF A SON TO ABRAHAM.

We begin with the promise God made to Abraham that he would give him a son, a promise recorded in both the Bible (Genesis 15.4) and the Qur'an (Surah 37.101). When he was seventy-five years old God said to him:

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves". Genesis 12. 1-3.

This glorious promise was repeated on a number of occasions to Abraham. On one of them God said to him that he would make his descendants like the dust of the earth so that, if the dust of the earth could be counted, his descendants also could be numbered (Genesis 13.16). On another occasion he made him look at the stars and said "Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them" (Genesis 15.5), adding that in the same way his descendants would be an innumerable multitude. At the same time he promised him that, although he was childless, his descendants would not come from a slave in his house but that his own son would be his heir (Genesis 15.4).

Abraham knew that it was physically impossible for his wife Sarah to have a son as she was barren and "it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Genesis 18.11), she being no less than sixty-five years old. Abraham knew, therefore, that if he was to have a son God would have to act in a supernatural way to bring it

about. Without doubting in any way, however, he believed that it would happen. His response of faith and God's appreciation of his trust are described as follows:

And he believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. Genesis 15.6

There are many people who believe that God can act in a supernatural way and such a conviction is no doubt essential to true faith in him. Abraham, however, believed in the promise for another reason. He responded in positive faith, not because he was persuaded of the power of God to accomplish anything he purposed, but because he trusted to the holy character of God who, he believed, would always be faithful to his own word. It was for this reason that God counted his faith to him as righteousness. To return to the illustration of the sun and the moon, the sun generates light and the best the moon can do is to reflect it as far as its nature allows. So God generates faithfulness and the best a man can do is to have faith in God and so reflect his faithfulness. When Abraham did precisely this, God, who also generates righteousness, counted Abraham's faith to him as a reflection of his righteousness as well. On this count he constituted and declared him righteous in his sight not by virtue of his own good works but by virtue of his trust in God's goodness and faithfulness. This then is the first thing we learn about the faith of Abraham the millata-Ibrahim as the Qur'an calls it. It was a faith in God's faithfulness. He based his whole trust on this precept which was firmly fixed in his mind:

Every word of God proves true. Proverbs 30.5

This brings us to the second thing we learn about his faith, and that is that his belief that God would exercise his power in a supernatural way to fulfil his promise arose, not out of a conviction that God could act in such a way because he was all-powerful, but that he would so act to fulfil his promise. The faithfulness of God to his own word demanded, in Abraham's mind, the conclusion that, although such things had never happened before, they would now, because God would surely fulfil his promise. He believed in God, therefore, as he who "gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist" (Romans 4.17). The only way a son could be born to him was if God intervened in the natural order and brought about a conception that could not naturally result, and so give life to the womb of a woman that was as good as dead, having ceased to function years earlier. In hope Abraham "believed against hope" (Romans 4.18) because he knew that God would surely fulfil his promise. He knew that God would never break his word and it was this conviction that gave him the grace to believe that he would duly bear a son. The third thing we learn about the real millata-Ibrahim, the true "faith of Abraham", is that he was not a man of blind faith, of uncomprehending resignation to the will of God. He was not the kind of man who did not reason about difficult matters and just trusted to what he had been brought up to believe without any kind of reflection or consideration, like so many people today. Fatalistic resignation was not Abraham's idea of surrendering to the will of God. As we analyse his faith we are bound to see it was far more profound than this. We cannot accept that God simply said to him *Aslim!* - "Submit!" - in the way a dog-trainer will command a dog "Heel!" If the dog does so respond, we will not say he has faith in his master, rather that he has been programmed into responding appropriately to the command. The only state of mind in the dog will be a fear of the consequences if he fails to obey. This certainly was not the attitude of Abraham. He did not say *aslamtu* - "I have submitted" - and come immediately to heel. No - this man Abraham is set forth in both the Bible and the Qur'an as the great human figurehead of faith whose example should be followed by all men (Galatians 3.9). There must have been more to Abraham's faith than blind, uncomprehending submission.

Because he always trusted in the faithfulness of God, he gave God's promise to him that he would have a son serious consideration and reflection. He considered that it came from a God who is faithful, reasoned that God would fulfil his word, came to a conclusion that it must therefore come to pass, and thus believed it. He reasoned carefully about the promise. He questioned whether it could be fulfilled. He could not naturally have a son but he knew that God was faithful and if God had promised to give him a son, then because of the faithfulness of God to his own word, the promise must surely come true.

Because of this exercise of faith, because he reasoned carefully about the matter and did not just accept the promise fatalistically, he came to understand how the son would be conceived and in so doing gained a greater understanding of the mind and will of God.

A further proof that God was, in fact, both testing and proving Abraham's faith in this manner is found in what followed. Instead of immediately giving him the son he had promised, God waited twenty-five years before he fulfilled his promise, by which time Abraham was a hundred years old and his wife ninety. In the meantime Abraham had begotten a son through his slave-woman Hagar and, believing God's promise to be fulfilled, he called him Ishmael, meaning "God hears". But no word came from God when Ishmael was born. For thirteen years no communication of any kind came from heaven to confirm that Ishmael was the child of the promise. Instead, at the end of this period, God finally called Abraham again and said to him of his wife Sarah:

"I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her". Genesis 17.10

At first he was astonished and even laughed to himself when he thought of the respective ages of Sarah and himself. But, being a man of the kind of faith he had, that which alone is true faith, namely a conviction that God will, in his faithfulness, make every word he says come true he immediately realised that this word of God would surely be fulfilled and that Sarah's son to come was the real son God had promised. He cried out to God, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight (Genesis 17.18). God replied emphatically "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him (Genesis 17.19).

The great promises of God were thus not to be fulfilled through the son of Abraham's slave-woman Hagar, whom Abraham named Ishmael, but through the son of Abraham's free woman and wife, Sarah, whom God named Isaac. Even the Qur'an confirms that the only son promised to Abraham by God was Isaac. In some passages (e.g. Surah 37.101) the son promised is not named, but in others he is specifically named as Isaac, the son of his wife Sarah. *Wa bashsharnaahu bi Ishaq* - "And we announced to him Isaac" (Surah 37.112, so also Surah 11.71). Nowhere in the Qur'an is it specifically stated that Ishmael was ever promised to Abraham by name as Isaac was.

This was a severe test of faith for Abraham but here, as anywhere else, we see his faith proved in all its fullness. He knew God was faithful and so he trusted yet again to his faithfulness. He knew that "every word of God proves true" (Proverbs 30.5) and therefore he was quickly assured that Isaac would be born as the promised son. He reasoned carefully yet again and this exercise of his faith is set out very strongly in this passage:

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Romans 4. 19-21.

He trusted, he considered, he grew strong in his faith and he became fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. "That is why his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Romans 4.22). This was the true *millata-Ibrahim*, the true faith of Abraham, and it enabled him to pass the test when God, through a promise that was finally fulfilled, put him through an exacting trial of patience and willingness to confide in him until the end. In this we see how Abraham came to be called the friend of God, not because he was a righteous servant who did a measure of good deeds, but because he at no time wavered through distrust in the promises God had given him. So also we see why he became the father of all true believers - because his faith was a reflection of God's faithfulness who likewise is the ultimate Father of the faithful. Finally we see why he was an example and prototype of the true religion to come - because he had the only kind of faith that is commendable and acceptable to God, that is, a comprehending and full conviction by sound reason (and not blind resignation) that God is Faithful and True and that every word of God will surely come to pass.

5. THE COMMAND TO SACRIFICE HIS SON.

The rejection of Ishmael came as a shock to Abraham but far worse was to follow. God was nowhere near finished with testing and proving the intensity and degree of his faith. The final and great test was about to confront him.

Just as he had watched Ishmael grow to thirteen years of age in hope of the fulfilment of the promises God had given him, only to see them dashed, so now he watched his son Isaac grow to the same age. Suddenly God again called him, "Abraham!" (Genesis 22.1). Immediately he responded "Here am I", expecting some indication of the fulfilment of God's promise that he was to have descendants as many as the stars of the sky. But God said to Abraham:

"Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall show you". Genesis 22.2

This command must have shocked and bewildered Abraham. Most people regard it - quite rightly - as a supreme test of Abraham's love for God, there being nothing more precious that he could offer to him than his only son by his wife Sarah and the only one still with him, Ishmael having departed from him with Hagar many years earlier. But Abraham is marked out more as a man of faith than a man of love. God was indeed testing Abraham's love for him but it is not often realised that God was really testing his faith and was putting himself on trial before him. Less than twenty years earlier he had promised him that he would give him descendants as many as the stars of the sky through his son Isaac - how could this promise now possibly be fulfilled if Abraham was to strike him down and consume him as a burnt offering? (Both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures state plainly that the son who was to be sacrificed was Isaac - Genesis 22.2, James 3.21 - and while the Qur'an does not say which son it was, it does confirm, in Surah 37. 101-102, that it was the son promised to him who, as we have already seen according to other Qur'anic passages, was Isaac).

Abraham could well have contemplated in his mind a gust of wind coming down on the smouldering ashes, saying to himself, "there goes the promise of God to the wind". It seemed that a pair of scissors was about to cut the string that tied the promise of a son to the promise that he would ultimately have descendants as many as the stars of the sky. The command to sacrifice appeared to cut right through these promises and hopelessly annul them. How could he have the descendants promised to him if his son Isaac was to be annihilated before he was old enough to bear offspring? If the call to reject Ishmael came as a shock to Abraham, the command to destroy Isaac must have taxed him to the limit. What was to be his response to this command?

There were at least four possible responses. Firstly, he could have said to himself, "God has forgotten his promise". After all, men forget things and fourteen years is a long time. But Abraham had far too high an impression of God's glory to believe such a thing. God would never forget such a promise, not even in a million years. Secondly, he could have mused, "God has changed his mind". Perhaps his son was not turning out to be quite what God had hoped for and expected and he had therefore changed his mind. Once again, however, Abraham could not entertain such thoughts. He believed that God is absolutely faithful and therefore there was no possibility that he would forego his promise.

Thirdly, he could have said to himself, "I do not know how the promise can be fulfilled if I offer my son as a sacrifice but, if God so commands, I will do it in obedience to his will. Let him resolve the dilemma". This is the spirit of fatalistic resignation, of blind faith that refuses to enquire or discover the will of God in accordance with his faithfulness. It is not true faith at all. There are millions today who believe that real faith is just simply to accept what their elders educate and bring them up to believe. To these any spirit of enquiry, any form of questioning, any willingness to doubt or critically analyse their heritage is regarded as the first step on the slippery road to unbelief.

Abraham was not such a man. He would not summarily abandon himself to the command to sacrifice his son without considerable reflection on its implications and circumstances. God put this very test of faith before him precisely because God knew that he would never see it through unless, as in the case of the birth of Isaac, he was fully convinced that it was consistent with God's faithfulness and the promise that he would have descendants like the stars of the sky.

The greatness of this man's faith is found in his refusal to simply bow to a command without understanding how it could be consistent with the absolute faithfulness of the One who gave it. God would have been most unimpressed with Abraham's attitude if he had simply said *aslamtu* - "I submit" - to the command to sacrifice his son without any consideration of what God's purpose was or what conciliation there was between the promises

he had received and the command which now appeared to contradict and negate them completely. God wanted him to once again exercise his faith, to explore at length the harmony between this seemingly dreadful command and the eternal faithfulness of the God who gave it, for it was through precisely such reasoning that God intended to reveal to him the glory of his salvation for all mankind. This leads us to the fourth and last possible response, the only one which could reconcile the promises God had given him with the command to sacrifice his son.

6. ABRAHAM'S CONTEMPLATION OF THE COMMAND.

We have seen that Abraham reasoned very carefully about the promise that his wife would bear him a son and that he believed it would surely come to pass, not just because God has the power to do anything he chooses, but because he believed that God is so faithful that he will always fulfil his word. As Abraham himself said on another occasion, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18.25). When the command came to sacrifice his son, therefore, Abraham did not suddenly lose heart and throw his hands in the air in confusion. No, he was a man of faith as the Bible and the Qur'an both testify, and at this point the genuineness of his faith was about to be proved in all its fullness.

Abraham considered none of the other three options we have mentioned with any degree of seriousness. He based his attitude on the same foundation which had seen him through all This previous tests. He believed that God is always faithful and, therefore, the promise that he would have children like the stars of the sky must surely be fulfilled. Although this promise appeared to be beyond fulfilment if his son was to be sacrificed, in the providence of God it must yet come to pass.

There was only one way that Abraham's son Isaac could beget offspring if he was to be sacrificed and that was by rising from the dead. Abraham concluded that this was the only way God's promise could be fulfilled and he reasoned that, if God could give him a son when it was naturally impossible to have one, then God could also raise him back to life from the ashes. We have already seen that he believed in God as he who "gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist" (Romans 4.17), and he therefore considered that if God could give life to a dead womb so that a child could be conceived by a woman who was ninety years old and who had always been barren, then he could also raise the same child from the dead. The Qur'an itself also teaches that Abraham once prayed, "My Lord, show me how you give life to the dead" (Surah 2.260). The whole of Abraham's contemplation of the command to sacrifice his son is summed up in these words:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named". He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. Hebrews 11. 17-19.

Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead and, through this belief, he gained a remarkable understanding of God's real purpose behind all that was happening to him. He suddenly realised that it was a risen Isaac who would be the one through whom all his descendants would come. No wonder his son would become a blessing to his offspring and one through whom all the nations would be blessed. Abraham realised that, by conquering death, his son Isaac would fulfil God's promise that he would become a blessing to the world. In this spirit he went forward boldly with the sacrifice in the faith that God would fulfil his promise by raising Isaac from the dead.

We need to notice how often it is said of Abraham that he carefully considered all that God said to him. "He considered his own body ... he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb ..." are the words describing his response to the promise that he would bear a son (Romans 4.19), and now we read, in response to the command to sacrifice, "He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead ..." (Hebrews 11.19). Abraham did not just accept all he was told to believe without contemplation and reflection. He was not like many who just accept what they are brought up to believe and will not consider alternatives lest they become confused or be required to give up all they have hitherto held dear. Abraham, rather, considered very deeply the promises God had given him as well as the command to sacrifice and he was able to reconcile these two apparently contradictory statements which came to him from heaven.

At first the command, as we have seen, seemed to cut through the promise like a pair of scissors slicing through a piece of string. The promise had consisted of two extremes - the birth of a son at the beginning and countless descendants at the end. In between these two came the devastating command to sacrifice. But Abraham could not believe that it was really contrary to the promise for both came from the God who, Abraham believed, was always faithful and consistent in his acts. He thus reasoned that the command, instead of violating the promise, must in some way be inseparably linked with it and that somehow the promise of descendants was dependent upon and to be fulfilled through the sacrifice of his son Isaac.

This led to the only possible conclusion - that God would raise his son from the dead, and through this Abraham saw, in a wondrous way, what God was really doing. A risen Isaac was to be the source of blessing to his offspring and to the world. Instead of cutting through the string that linked the promise of a son to that of countless descendants, he saw that the command was actually the hand that tied the two together and gave effect and meaning to the promises. This was the true millata-Ibrahim, not an uncomprehending, unquestioning submission to God's commands, but an exercise of real faith that considered all God's promises and commands against the sure background of his faithfulness, a faith that led to an outstanding realisation of what God was really doing with him.

If this were all we would do well to marvel. But it was only a shadow, a foretaste of what God was really going to do. The sacrifice of Isaac was only a prototype of a far greater sacrifice to come and we must press on to find out how Abraham saw the ultimate significance of what God was doing in all this and how he discovered the true religion that was to come.

7. THE GOSPEL THAT WAS PREACHED TO ABRAHAM.

We have seen, in the early chapters of this booklet, that Abraham was called the friend of God, that he was made the father of many nations, and that his faith was a prototype of the true religion yet to come. In this closing chapter we shall see the real essence of all three of these great teachings about Abraham which Islam and Christianity have in common.

Abraham was a man who carefully considered all that God said to him, so he also thought much about God's statement to him, "I have made you the Father of many nations" (Romans 4.17). Why, he reasoned, should he be made a leader for mankind and the father of the faithful? We return to the illustration of the sun and the moon. The sun brilliantly generates light and the best the moon can do is to reflect that light. So Abraham, as we have seen, merely regarded his faith and trust in God as a reflection of God's own inherent faithfulness and eternal trustworthiness. In the same way, therefore, his status as father of the faithful could only be a reflection of God's own glory as the true Father of the faithful.

Abraham saw his high status, therefore, as a reflection of God's great glory in heaven. He realised that he was merely a type of the true Father and this surely meant that all that had happened to him was likewise only a human and an earthly type of a divine and heavenly course yet to be revealed. If he was, thus, only a type, then his son Isaac, the unusual circumstances of his birth, the sacrifice, the resurrection from the dead, and the innumerable descendants were also all types of a greater reality yet to come. He realised that the whole process had issued from him purely as a man and that a similar process, therefore, must yet come from God.

Abraham put it all together. The course he had perceived that was yet to be emulated in a divine parallel was this - the father was to have a son born in this world, born in unusual circumstances by the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and this son would be a decidedly spiritual man all his days. Before he could have any descendants, however, he was to be offered as a sacrifice to God, struck down by the hand of his own father. But he would rise from the dead and the risen son would beget descendants of a great number through whom the nations of the world would be blessed.

God had promised Abraham descendants "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore" (Hebrews 11.12). Were the latter not surely a reflection of the former? Both appear to be tiny specks to the human eye and both are too many to number. So the true children of God appear to be of the same stature today as the natural children of men and both are a great multitude. But what a vast difference there

ultimately is between a grain of sand and a star. The first is really only a speck of dust on the earth, the second is a heavenly giant of unimaginable glory and splendour. Grains of sand are only feeble types of the splendid stars that shine in the heavens.

So Abraham realised that his earthly descendants through his promised son Isaac, namely the Hebrew people, would only be an earthly shadow of the true children of God who would one day "shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13.43). He realised that he would have physical offspring through Isaac but that he would also have spiritual offspring through the one that Isaac was representing and that they would be men of the very same faith that had commended him to God.

Abraham searched out the meaning of all this as he moved away from the reflection to the reality, from earth to heaven, from man to God, and in doing so discovered God's glorious process of salvation and the true religion that was yet to come. God, the true Father, was to send his own Son into the world. He would be born miraculously by the power of the Holy Spirit, he would live solely by the same Spirit as the image of his eternal Father in every way, and would transform men of all nations from sinners of mere flesh and blood into saints of true spiritual dignity, bringing them eventually into eternal glory in the kingdom of God. But first he must be cut off and sacrificed as an offering for sin. He was to burn within as he endured the wrath of God on behalf of those he was to redeem. He was to be struck down, not only physically at the hands of men, but spiritually by the hand of his own Father as he endured his wrath against the sins of men so that he might make full atonement for them.

The Son of God was to rise from the dead, however, and the risen son was to make available to all men of true faith the Spirit of God so that they might inherit the blessings of God and become his children in his heavenly kingdom. Ibis, Abraham realised, was the logical divine parallel that would follow the pattern God was already ready taking him through To put it plainly in one glorious flash of inspiration and revelation, Abraham saw the whole of the Christian Gospel By a faithful consideration of nothing more than two apparently contradictory statements, he worked out the whole of God's plan of salvation that was yet to come. By exercising faith in the "unchangeable character of his purpose" (Hebrews 6.17), he saw the glory of the Gospel of the grace of God. As Abraham walked with Isaac to the place of sacrifice, his son asked him what they were going to sacrifice. He had to explain to Isaac that he himself was to be the sacrifice, but as he did so he made a remarkable statement. He said to Isaac:

"God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son". Genesis 22.8

Abraham's answer to him was, "My son, you are to be the sacrifice. I, your own father, must offer you like a sacrificial lamb to God. But take heart, God will give of himself a lamb for an offering. God, the true Father, will give his own Son as the lamb for the salvation of the world". Abraham genuinely believed that he would have to go through with the sacrifice of his son Isaac. He did not anticipate that God would stop the process and put a sheep in his place. This would have negated the whole test Abraham was being put through. No, Abraham obviously had another lamb in mind - the Lamb of God who would yet come as a sacrifice for the sins of the world, God's own Son. When God stopped the sacrifice and told him to sacrifice a sheep instead, Abraham saw his perception of God's ultimate plan of salvation being fulfilled. The sheep was sacrificed as a substitute for his son Isaac, and so Abraham saw that God's own son would become the true Lamb who would be substituted for sinful men as he died as a sacrifice for their sins.

We have already seen that, whereas Judaism, Christianity and Islam all came after Abraham, each one sees Abraham as an example of true faith in God, and we noted that Abraham must have had some knowledge of the true religion to come. Now it is important to observe that, whereas Moses and Muhammad both knew much about Abraham, neither ever claimed that Abraham had anticipated their day. There is no suggestion that Abraham looked forward to the form of religion they were to introduce. On the other hand Jesus Christ, in an argument one day with the Jews about Abraham, boldly declared to them:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it, and was glad". John 8.56

It is thus clear that the one to whom Abraham was looking as the Son of God who would come into the world to redeem men from their sins was Jesus Christ. He rejoiced, said Jesus, "that he was to see my day" and it was to

him that he looked for the ultimate fulfilment of all his hopes, not to Moses or Muhammad, but only to Jesus. He looked ahead, not to his immediate son Isaac, but to his greater son yet to come who he knew would be the Son of God. He had exercised his faith in a very deliberate way, had reasoned carefully about the promises, and thus foresaw, in one glorious comprehension of the significance of the sacrifice, the coming of the Son of God as his greater offspring to bring salvation into the world. It is for this reason that one of the very first titles of Jesus in the Christian Scriptures is "the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1.1). Indeed one day, when John the Baptist (the prophet yahya in the Qur'an - Surah 3.39) saw Jesus coming towards him, he cried out:

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world". John 1.29

Abraham had comforted Isaac, promising that God would "provide of himself the lamb for a sacrifice" and, when John beheld Jesus, he exclaimed "There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world". The whole key to Abraham's remarkable discovery of what was to happen is found in his faith, a trust in God's faithfulness through which he reconciled the promise of descendants with the command to sacrifice. He foresaw the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and worked out that the Son of God would become the ultimate sacrifice for sin and that through him the blessings promised to Abraham would become real to all men in all nations who would emulate his faith and trust in the same Jesus. The whole of this vision which Abraham had of the coming salvation of God is well summed up in these words:

That in Christ Jesus the blessings of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. Galatians 3.14

The Qur'an says that Abraham could not have been a Christian because the Gospel, the Injil, was only revealed long after him through Jesus Christ (Surah 3. 65,67). But we can see clearly that this very "Gospel", that is, the "Good News" of God's saving grace, was in fact revealed to him during his very lifetime and that he fully discerned it when he, in true faith, contemplated the command to sacrifice his son. This revelation is well described in this verse:

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed". So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith. Galatians 3. 8-9.

When the promise of descendants as many as the stars of the sky was made to Abraham, the Injil was in fact revealed to him. The Qur'an asks why Christians dispute about Abraham when the Gospel was "not revealed till after him" (Surah 3.65), yet here we see plainly that this very Gospel was preached beforehand to Abraham (Galatians 3.8). His faith led him to a full realisation of what was to come and he thus anticipated the atoning death and resurrection of the Son of God and so became a prototype of all true Christians, rejoicing that he was to see the day of Jesus Christ.

This, then, is the true faith of Abraham, the only real mil/ata-Ibrahim - faith in the Son of God who died that we might be forgiven and rose from the dead so that we too might conquer death and obtain eternal life. This Abraham worked out by exercise of faith in God's faithfulness and here his faith rested. He "died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar" (Hebrews 11.13). It was through this very kind of faith that he became approved of God and it is through the same kind of faith that we too can become acceptable to God.

But the words, "it was reckoned to him", were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4. 23-25.

Abraham became the friend of God because he trusted him and rejoiced to see the day of Jesus Christ who likewise promised that all who become his disciples will also be his friends (John 15.15). He became the father of all true believers who are now his children if they share his faith and believe in the Gospel (Galatians 3. 8-9). He was the prototype of the true religion to come and, as his search for the purpose of God led him to discover

the coming of the Son of God as the Saviour of the world, so the true religion has to be Christianity for it was in Jesus that his faith reached its goal.

In conclusion it needs to be said that if the willingness of Abraham to offer his son to God was the highest proof of love that any man could show for God, then the grace of God in giving his Son Jesus Christ for us must be the greatest manifestation of God's love for men. The sacrifice of Isaac was only a type and shadow of God's love for us revealed in the gift of his Son as the means of our salvation. No greater love than this could have been shown by God to sinful men.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins . . . So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 1 John 4.9-10,16.

Furthermore Abraham, as the servant of God, was obliged to obey God in whatever he commanded him, and it was only a man of dust like himself, though his own son, that he was willing to offer to the God of glory in heaven. But what obligation lay on the heart of God to give his Son, who had always shared his everlasting glory, for sinful, feeble men on earth? It goes further. God eventually spared the son of Abraham but he did not spare his own Son. What further proof do we need that all the blessings promised to Abraham will one day be ours if we will commit ourselves in faith to the one who laid down his life for us, whose day Abraham eagerly anticipated - what more can we ask or need?

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?
Romans 8.32

Both the Bible and the Qur'an mark Abraham out for his faith and declare that this faith is the essence of true religion. We have shown comprehensively that Abraham's faith reached its zenith when he saw the coming of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world and thus "rejoiced" to see his day "and was glad" (John 8.56). The Christian faith is, therefore, the only true faith and Abraham was accordingly a prototype of a true Christian.

The command to Abraham to sacrifice his son may be regarded as the greatest example of the love of a man for God being tested and proved to the limit, indeed it reveals this love almost to perfection. But it cannot be treated in isolation. God was surely not just putting Abraham through an exercise of faith and love as an end in itself. It is unthinkable that God could ever ask more of a man than he was willing to do for man. And if he did not in turn give his own Son as a sacrifice to save us from our sins and give us the hope of eternal life, then what expression is there, in all history, of the love of God for man to compare with this supreme example of a man's love for God in giving his own son, the closest thing to his heart, as a sacrifice to God? It surely must be true that God's command to Abraham was only a shadow and foretaste of what God himself intended to do for the human race in time.

It is often said that a good leader will never ask anything more of his followers than he himself is willing to do for them. So likewise Abraham saw that the command to sacrifice was not a one-sided test that would tear at his heart without any reciprocal act of love from heaven in return. He willingly went ahead with the sacrifice, because he had, by the time he took his son up the appointed mountain, worked out that all that he was doing was only a shadow and human example of a real and divine work of grace to follow. It is little wonder that Jesus said that Abraham rejoiced to see his day and that he was delighted in his spirit.

Will you not, too, become one of the true children of Abraham by putting your faith in Jesus Christ so that you also may shine one day as one of those stars of heaven who was promised to Abraham? Will you not believe in Jesus as your Saviour and Lord and likewise rejoice and be glad with Abraham that you will also be privileged to see his day? Will you not acknowledge him as your only true Master so that you too may enjoy the riches of God's grace and kindness towards us?

If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3.29

The Love of God in the Qur'an and the Bible

By John Gilchrist

THE LOVE OF GOD IN THE QUR'AN AND THE BIBLE

1. The Great and First Commandment
2. The Love of God in the Qur'an
3. The Fatherhood of God in the Bible
4. The Revelation of God's Love in Jesus Christ
5. Knowing God's Love through the Holy Spirit

The Love of God in the Qur'an and the Bible

"You shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, by walking in his ways and by fearing him".
Deuteronomy 8:6

Moses spoke these words to the Children of Israel shortly before he died. No one need marvel at them for our Creator naturally has the right to demand that his creatures obey his laws and commandments. It is our bounden duty to keep God's laws and we deservedly incur his wrath if we do not do so. Just as a servant is obliged to render loyal service to his master, so it is the duty of all men to fear God and keep his commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). If we were to ask, however, which is the greatest of all God's commandments, what would the answer be? Would it be simply that we must believe in the oneness of God and perform the duties he lays upon us? Or is some higher obligation expected of us? Let us hear Moses again to discover whether indeed there is a greater duty upon us towards God other than that of simply keeping his laws.

"What does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul". Deuteronomy 10:12

Once again the command to serve God is given to us but now a new dimension has come into the command. It is found in these three words: "to love him". Principally the difference made by these three words is that our service to God is not to be merely the servile exercise of the duties he lays upon us but clearly must be the expression of the affections of our own hearts toward him. Moses very carefully made his people know that such is the service God expects from men. The mere discharge of a duty is not what he requires. The only service he will accept from men is that which flows from love that proceeds from the heart. Moses emphasises this fact again and again during his last words to the Children of Israel:

"You shall therefore LOVE the Lord your God". Deuteronomy 11:1

"I command you this day, to love the Lord your God". Deuteronomy 11:13

In his eyes, therefore, it is of supreme importance that we serve God out of love and that all that we do should be done in love towards him.

1. The Great and First Commandment

Centuries later a Jewish scribe came up to Jesus and put a question to him to test his interpretation of the law to see whether he agreed with the opinions of the Jewish elders:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Matthew 22:36

The Jews had studied God's laws exhaustively and this one wished to test Jesus to see what answer he would give him to this question. At once Jesus said:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment." Matthew 22:37-38

The command to love God is therefore the greatest and foremost of all his commandments. All other laws and all the teachings of the prophets are summed up in this one law to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls and minds. No other law can faithfully be kept unless it is kept in a spirit of love.

What, however, is love? Can we say that by our efforts to obey God's laws we automatically show that we love him? That obedience to his commands is an essential aspect of love towards him is not to be disputed. No one who disobeys his commands loves him. Nevertheless the mere performance of religious duties is not proof of the presence of love. Men who endeavour to serve God may do so through fear, pride or prospect of reward. Love, therefore, is not necessarily the motivation behind such service. We must serve and obey God if we love him but this service must be done out of love, and must be motivated by love. One of the closest disciples of Jesus, the Apostle John, put it as follows:

"And this is love, that we follow his commandments; this is the commandment, as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love." 2 John 6

There is clearly something intensely deep about obedience that grows out of love. When we analyse the basic principles of love, we find certain essential features which must be present for this love to be truly exercised.

Firstly, love must be genuine (Romans 12:9). It must be an uninhibited expression of the affections of the heart. There must be complete freedom for such love to be genuinely exercised. If there is any presence of fear in the heart, love cannot be openly displayed. The fear of punishment will automatically disqualify the one who has it from genuinely loving the one he fears. All his service towards that person will be done with the purpose of alleviating the wrath of that person towards him. Such service, therefore, springs not from love but from self-motivation. The man who serves God because he has no assurance of forgiveness from God, and seeks by this service to obtain that forgiveness, has his own welfare at heart. He most certainly does not truly love God for love is selfless. Love, as a motivation of the heart, knows no partners. For love to be genuine there cannot be any other factor affecting the service of the one who seeks to express that love.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love". 1 John 4:18

Accordingly, if a man would serve God and keep his commandments through genuine love, there may not be any fear of God's wrath in his heart. This makes it essential, from the outset, for there to be complete knowledge of forgiveness in the heart of the man who would serve God out of love. That forgiveness must be experienced now, and may not be an uncertain prospect at a time to come in the future.

If a man is unsure of God's complete remission of his sins, and if he does not enjoy a state of permanent forgiveness for all that he may think or do, he cannot possibly serve God out of genuine love. Though he profess love towards God, he must really serve him with the primary objective of obtaining his forgiveness and alleviating his wrath. Such service is, as we have seen, principally self-motivated for it seeks approval for itself rather than the glory of God. Therefore, if we are to truly love God, we must first experience the perfect knowledge of his forgiveness in our hearts. For our love to be genuine, a condition of complete peace with God must reign within us.

Secondly, love must be expressive. Unless deeds of love flow from the heart, there is no love in the heart of the worshipper. Love is an empty vacuum unless it manifests itself in appropriate ways.

"Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and truth". 1 John 3:18

From the side of man the obvious form of this expression is through heartfelt obedience to God's commands. As Jesus himself put it on the last night he was with his disciples:

"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he is it who loves me". John 14:21

God will discover no love in us towards him if we do not obey his commandments. Nevertheless, if it is God's desire not only that we should obey his laws but that we should do so completely out of love, then it is essential that there be in the nature of God that which merits this love. The expression of man's love towards God must be in response to, and in gratitude for, the manifestation of God's love towards man. If men have knowledge of the

love of God through some definite revelation of it in the history of God's dealings with them, then it is not only possible but essential that men express their appreciation of this fact through love towards God.

In one of the most beautiful books in the Bible, the Song of Solomon, we have a splendid example of this principle. The book concerns the deepest affections of a man and his bride for one another. On one occasion when he was apart from her, she sought him desperately, saying to her companions:

"I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love". Song of Solomon 5:8

Mildly surprised by this determined quest for the presence of the one she loved (which they apparently did not share for their own partners), her companions said to her in reply:

"What is your beloved more than another beloved?" Song of Solomon 5:9

In a lengthy reply she detailed the worth of her loved one and showed that she considered him to excel in every respect, from his head to his feet. He was, in her view, distinguished among ten thousand. It was little wonder that a deeper expression of love for her beloved sprang from her heart than from those of her companions for their spouses. She summed up his worth in these words:

"His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem". Song of Solomon 5:16

Because he excelled in honour all the other men of her nation she naturally expressed a deeper affection for him than her companions did for their husbands. With these principles in mind it must surely be true that those who see the very best of God's love towards men will respond in the most fervent way in love towards him. Those who see God's love in the works of nature and the many providential graces he extends towards us will find it possible to express love to him in return. But if God should choose to demonstrate his love for mankind by giving of his very own self to redeem them from sin, no men on earth will know the capacity of love towards God which those have who are in fact partakers of this redemption. The deeper the revelation of God's love towards mankind, the deeper will be the response of love towards him in those who believe in and appropriate the effects of this love.

Thirdly, love must be mutual. No man will be able to sustain love in his heart towards a woman who scorns that love and within a marriage love can only really develop where the spouses reciprocate their love for each other. If we are to be rooted and grounded in love, for one another, it is necessary that such love be mutual for a perfect balance to take effect. An achievement of such mutual love will result in such an expression as this from the one who shares in that love:

"I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine". Song of Solomon 6:3

Love is the greatest of all abiding graces (1 Corinthians 13:13). When God commands men to love him with all their hearts, he is drawing on the greatest of all virtues in doing so. He seeks the best form of worship he could possibly obtain from them. But for such worship to develop to its highest possible potential in men, the expression of love between men and God must be mutual. Not only is it necessary for God to manifest his love towards men but he must also allow men the fullest possible experience of that love in their own hearts for such mutual love to truly be present.

Therefore let us at this stage formulate our conclusions about the "great commandment" that each of us should love God with all his heart, soul and mind. This commandment demonstrates the will of God that men should give of their very best for him. Nothing less than genuine love, expressed in positive ways, is acceptable to God. But for this to be possible on the part of men, three initiatives are needed on the part of God. They are these:

1. He must offer forgiveness of sins to all from whom he expects this love so that it may be real and undisturbed by fear.
2. He must manifest and reveal his love for men in such a way that they can respond to him in love.

3. He must allow men the personal knowledge of his love and a living experience of it in their hearts if a mutual, abiding communion based on love is to develop between him and them.

It may seem strange, even presumptuous, to some men to say that God "must" do these things, but when all the implications are considered it is surely obvious that for creatures to obey the commandment to love God, these factors must of necessity be present. Otherwise men cannot possibly exert such genuine love towards God as he expects of them.

2. The Love of God in the Qur'an

Christianity and Islam have different views of God. Both the Bible and the Qur'an claim to be the Word of God but the theology of God is often strikingly different in these two books. What we are particularly concerned about here, however, is to discover in which book we find the best revelation of God's love towards men. Let us begin by studying briefly the teaching of the Qur'an about the love of God.

Firstly, there is in the Qur'an an exhortation to men to love God. Perhaps the best verse in the Qur'an which contains this injunction is this one:

"Say, If ye love Allah, follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins". Surah 3:31

Significantly, however, one does not find in this verse (nor in any other in the Qur'an) the command to love God with "all your heart, soul and mind". The reason is fairly clear from the verse itself. The hearer is exhorted to love God so that he may thereby obtain God's love and forgiveness. The basic object, therefore, of this love is the acquittal and approval of God for the believer. Accordingly the motivation for such love must be the welfare and comfort of the believer. It is not suggested in the Qur'an that such love must be exercised in a disinterested and selfless manner with the glory of God foremost in the believer's mind. On the contrary the object of such love is really the believer himself. He seeks by this love fundamentally to turn aside God's wrath and to gain his approval in its place. Now this is not the fruit of genuine love. Such love, as we have seen, must be the exercise of the purest affections of the heart towards God - it cannot be accompanied by an ancillary motive such as the principal objective of obtaining God's forgiveness.

For this reason it is therefore quite significant that the Qur'an does not exhort the believer to love God with all his heart. Such love from the heart is essentially selfless in nature. That which seeks its own security does not proceed from the heart. It is not the expression of the deepest affections of the very kernel of a man's being. Love in the latter sense seeks principally the glory of its object - but that which strives for the approval of God and considers primarily its own prospects of forgiveness is fundamentally self-motivated. It cannot be described as genuine love and certainly he who loves God chiefly to obtain his forgiveness is not fulfilling the royal commandment - indeed what Jesus called the "great and first commandment" to love God with all his heart, soul and mind. As we saw earlier, the fear of God's wrath disqualifies the potential for genuine love in the heart.

The Qur'an does not give the believer any total assurance of the forgiveness of all his sins this side of the grave. Accordingly it is hardly surprising that it sets the prospect of forgiveness at the end of life as the reward of service to God. Even then there is no complete assurance that the believer will be forgiven and the believer can only die in the hope of God's mercy (Surah 17:57). It must again be stressed, however, that such service is done purely out of love towards oneself with the welfare of the self at heart. Only when the believer begins with the total knowledge of God's forgiveness can he serve God freely out of genuine love. As long as he fears God's wrath he cannot possibly exercise real love towards God with the glory of God as the principal concern of his heart.

Accordingly it must be concluded that the teaching of the Qur'an does not meet the needs of genuine love. It leaves presently undecided the fact of forgiveness and its exhortations to men to love God are given with one chief objective - the realisation of his acquittal and approval. In such circumstances a man cannot honestly love God with all his heart. He cannot express such love without some prospect of acquittal and acceptance with God foremost in his soul and mind.

Secondly, we find that the Qur'an says very little about the expression of God's love for mankind. Almost invariably the Qur'an speaks of this love as an expression of approval of those who do good. This verse gives a typical example of this fact (and has the same theme as the others on this subject):

"Spend your wealth for the cause of Allah, and be not cast by your own hands to ruin; and do good. Lo! Allah loveth the beneficent". Surah 2:135

Throughout the Qur'an we read that Allah loves those who do good and does not love those who do evil. This means principally that he approves of those who do good and accordingly disapproves of those who do evil. In every case where the expression occurs in the Qur'an it can easily be translated "approves of" instead of "loves" without any change in the meaning of the expression at all. The knowledge and realisation of this approval will also only be known at the Last Day. This is virtually all that the Qur'an says about the love of God towards mankind.

In our view this is insufficient to awaken in men heartfelt love towards God. There is no present expression of that love from God which can evoke the response of love in men towards him. Indeed the Qur'an often appeals to that which is visible in nature as a proof of God's existence and character. But it is the order in nature itself which reveals the existence and sovereignty of the one true God (Romans 1.20). The Qur'an does not reveal this fact - it is merely appealing to the revelation of it in nature. But apart from this the Qur'an tells us really nothing about the depth of the love of God towards men outside of that which can be discovered in nature. It does not disclose any great act of love in the history of God's dealings with men which should cause the response of heartfelt love towards him in return. To put it in a nutshell, there is no definite expression of love in the heart of God towards men in the Qur'an. No proof of deep affection towards mankind is given at all.

The filial love that a father has for his own children and the revelation of that love is not found in the relationship between God and men in the Qur'an. It has no concept of the Fatherhood of God and whereas God is most commonly called "the Father" in the Bible no such exalted title is found in the Qur'an. Furthermore there is no manifestation of God's love towards mankind which is of the greatest form of love - that of self-denial and self-sacrifice. One does not find in the Qur'an a unilateral display of love in God which expresses itself on behalf of mankind in such a way that God is willing to give of himself to prove and manifest that love. Indeed, even in respect of the teaching that he "loves" those who do good we do not find that this love is an expression of sentiment in the heart of God towards the faithful. In the context of this hadith - which is very consistent with the teaching of the Qur'an about the attitude of Allah towards mankind (Surah 5:18) - we see very clearly the total lack of sentiment in this love:

"Verily Allah created Adam and then rubbed his back with His right hand and took out a progeny from him and said: I created these for Paradise and with the actions of the inmates of Paradise which they will do. Afterwards he rubbed his back with His hand and took out a progeny from him and said: I created these for Hell and with the actions of the inmates of Hell which they will do". (Mishkat al-Masabih, Vol.3, p.107)

We are constrained to conclude that there is no expression of glorious, heartfelt love of God in the Qur'an which would enable men in return to honour his desire and command that we should love him with all our 'hearts, souls and minds. If God in his very own nature does not have heartfelt love towards men, they cannot possibly be expected to express such love towards him in return.

Lastly we find, as a matter of course after what has already been said, that there is, in the teaching of the Qur'an, no capacity for mutual love between God and men such as that between a man and his wife which we discover in the Song of Solomon. It is not possible, according to the Qur'an, for men to actually experience God's love in their very own hearts such as a son's experience of his father's love and a wife of her husband's love. God is indeed called the "Loving One" (al- Wadud) in the Qur'an but only on two occasions (Surahs 11.90, 85.14). This statement, however, does not imply the depth of love in the nature of God such as is found in the Biblical declaration "God is love" (1 John 4:8). Instead one of the great theologians in Islamic history, al-Ghazzali, is at pains to inform us that the expression "the Loving One" means far less than the title would seem to indicate. In his work on the names of God in the Qur'an entitled *Al-Maqsad Al-Asna* he states that this title in the Qur'an is a lesser one, for example, than "the Merciful" (ar-Rahim) - an opinion with which we find ourselves compelled to agree, for God is called "the Merciful" over two hundred times in the Qur'an but "the Loving One"

only twice. Al-Ghazzali explains this love as consisting solely of objective acts of kindness and expressions of approval. He denies that there is any subjectivity in the love of God, that is, that God feels any love in his own heart towards mankind.

"He remains above the feeling of love". (Al-Maqsad Al-Asna, p.91).

How anyone can be "above" the feeling of love is not at all clear. Love is the greatest of all virtues and anyone who does not feel love in the inmost part of his being must surely be below this excellent grace - indeed far below it. But if it is indeed true that God is devoid of such subjective love towards mankind, then men cannot develop love in their hearts towards him especially to the extent where they love him with all their hearts, souls and minds. Al-Ghazzali confirms this unfortunate fact by saying of God's love:

"Love and mercy are desired in respect of their objects ONLY for the sake of their fruit and benefit and NOT because of empathy or feeling". (Al-Maqsad Al-Asna, p.91).

The emphases are mine. Men therefore cannot have the greatest of privileges - the actual personal knowledge of God's very own love. They can receive things from God as tokens of kindness and approval but God himself cannot be known. There is no possibility of a mutual expression of love between God and men which can develop and grow into a wondrous communion and fellowship between him and the believer.

In these circumstances we can understand why the Qur'an omits the Biblical command to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. If men cannot now obtain total assurance of forgiveness of their sins, no such genuine love is possible from them. If love is not part of God's very own being but is only discerned in that which he gives to men; if he has not manifested deep love towards mankind in any specific way; and if he likewise withholds from men any personal experience of his very own love, then no one can possibly love him in return from his heart. There is nothing in him that can awaken the response of such love in men.

Moses and Jesus, however, both declared that the fundamental thing that God requires of men is indeed such heartfelt love. Were these men imposing on their followers an impossible command - or did they, on the contrary, have a greater and deeper knowledge of God's real nature than we find in the Qur'an? Because of its limited view of God's love, the Qur'an wisely refrains from commanding of men the greatest possible devotion to God - that of inexhaustible love from the heart. Such love could only be expected of men if God himself is far greater than the Qur'an makes him out to be. He will have to be far more majestic, positively greater, distinctly superior and infinitely more loving if men are to succeed in loving him with all their hearts.

God can only make such a lofty claim on the devotion of men justly if he is prepared right now to give them forgiveness of sins, reveal through some act of love that he is positively worthy of that love, and graciously extend to men the full personal knowledge of this love. If he expects of men the greatest possible expression of devotion - love from the heart - he must be a God worthy of that love. Let us turn to the Bible to see whether the God of Moses and Jesus is indeed such a God.

3. The Fatherhood of God in the Bible

One of the striking features of the Christian Bible is the title "Father" for God. He is given no name in the Christian Scriptures (unlike the other major religions of the world where God is always given a name in their holy books) but is always called by this title - either as "the Father" or "our Father" or "God the Father". When one considers the intimate relationship that exists between a father and his children, it is very easy to understand why we have no name for God. [A man is addressed by his name when other men speak to him but his child always calls him "father". He does not address him by his surname for he himself bears his father's name. A name is given to a person to identify him from other men and a child bears his father's name because of the very close relationship between them. But, in view of this intimacy, it is not necessary that a father and his son should address one another by that common name.

Therefore, if God is pleased to become the Father of his people, this must mean that he is willing to enter into such a deep personal relationship with them that no name will be in any way needed to distinguish him from them. Not only so, but the command to love him with all our hearts, souls and minds has the best prospect of

fulfilment if God, in deep love for us, is willing to become our very own Father. What child is there whom his father does not love? As John put it:

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are". 1 John 3:1

This does not mean that God has taken to himself offspring but rather that he is prepared to draw so near to us in love that the intimate communion which will result from this love between him and true believers can only be compared to that which exists between a loving father and his children.

Now we know that God is Judge of all the earth and that he will deal with the sins of men on the Day of Wrath to come when his righteous judgments will be revealed. If we only know God as Judge of all we can expect no mercy on that day for men are brought before judges to be tried and condemned for their misdeeds. But a father is very different to a judge. While he may, in love and with the purpose of correction, chastise his children, it is forgiveness that really characterises the relationship between him and them. They will always be his children and, while a servant must work to earn his place in a home, and even then only stays outside in the servant's quarters and can be dismissed at any time, a son has absolute freedom in his father's house. He does not need to work to earn a place there, nor does he reside outside the house. He cannot be dismissed, but remains the heir to all things in his father's house. That which is the father's is his also. We all surely know the expression "one day my son, this will all be yours", symbolising the inheritance the son has to all that the father has built up during his lifetime. The following brief conversation between Jesus and his close disciple Peter brings this fact out very clearly:

"What do you think Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others?" And when he said "From others", Jesus said to him "Then the sons are free". Matthew 17:25-26.

In this context we must consider the Biblical teaching that God is the Father of the true Christian. If so, it means that the kingdom of heaven is the rightful home of every true believer. Because he is a child of God, he must right now be recognised as a lawful member of the household of God (Ephesians 2:19). He does not have to earn his place there, nor will he ever be dismissed from this kingdom. Indeed he will never even dwell outside it. He has as much right to a place in God's kingdom as a son has in his father's house. If God is indeed willing to share such grace with his true children, then "what love" indeed is this that he has given us. Jesus made it plain that God indeed wills to have such an intensely deep and personal relationship with the true believer:

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". Luke 12:32

This heart-warming promise leads us to the issue that particularly concerns us about the genuineness of love that men must have towards God. We have seen that fear of God's wrath and the uncertainty of his forgiveness destroy the potential for genuine love. Now, if God is prepared to be our Father, then this problem is solved immediately. By becoming our Father he has made us his children and we are therefore set free from the fear of God's wrath because we are now already assured that heaven is, and always will be, our real home.

A father always loves his own children in a very special way and no matter how well-disposed he may be towards children generally, he will always have a deeper affection for his own children than for others. The reason is simply that he sees something of himself in his own children that he does not see in others. Even though he may have sons very different to each other in looks and temperament, he will in so many ways, as he looks at them both, be able to say, "that is me". So also, if God becomes our Father, we may know that he has a special affection for us, that in some unique way he sees something of himself in us, and for this reason will assuredly never disown us.

No wonder Jesus said "Fear not". The fear of punishment has been set aside. We no longer anticipate a judge on the throne of justice before whom we must be condemned to eternal damnation for our sins. We look to a father whose kingdom is our own home and we rejoice in our hope, as children, of sharing and inheriting his glory to be revealed at the last time. Two thousand years ago Jesus instructed his disciples, in praying to God, to call on him as "our Father" (Matthew 6.9). This indicates, not a status to be longed for in the next age, but one which is presently enjoyed by every one of his disciples. As two of Jesus' followers put it, indeed his two most eminent apostles:

"We ARE children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ". Romans 8:17

"We ARE God's children NOW" . 1 John 3:2

In these circumstances God can be known as Father NOW and he who is a child of God need fear no wrath in the age to come. Judges execute wrath on wrongdoers and separate them from society; masters punish wayward slaves and dismiss them from their service; but fathers love their children and will always do so. So the Christian has no fear of God's wrath but only the knowledge of his love. As Jesus said to his own disciples:

"The Father himself loves you". John 16:27

Accordingly the Christian can place all his trust in God, knowing that the deep intimate relationship he shares with him will never be broken - for God is his or Father and he is one of his children. Therefore the God of the Bible meets the first requirement of genuine love from the heart. As the father of all true believers he need not be held in dread. The Day of Judgment will, instead, be a day of glory for the true Christian. God has, in these circumstances, the right to expect those who believe in him to love him genuinely with all their hearts.

There is an implied expression of the love of God for us in his declaration that he is our Father and, as a Father can be known more intimately by his children than by anyone else, the potential for mutual love here is quite obvious. Let us press on to see more fully what God has done to express his love for us so that we may know that he is indeed our Father and how he has made it possible for that love to be mutual between him and his children.

4. The Revelation of God's Love in Jesus Christ

We saw earlier that love must be expressive and, in particular, that God must manifest his love for us in some way if we are to love him with all our hearts in return. Now the Christian Bible gives such a manifestation of God's love - indeed the greatest possible expression of it that men could ever expect from him. In the following passage this revelation of God's love is fully set out:

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us". 1 John 4:7-11.

The striking feature of this passage is the frequent recurrence of the words "God" and "love". The writer is so persuaded of the inseparable link between the two that he sums it up in these words: God IS love (1 John 4:8). This means that right in the very heart of God's own personal interest in men rests the deepest possible affection and concern for them. The love of God in this case is clearly not to be found solely outside of himself in "fruit and benefit" as al-Ghazzali suggests. On the contrary it is that love which exists within the very nature of God and it is the love of God himself that is revealed to men in the Gospel. One can safely say that more is said of God's love in this one short passage in the Bible than in the whole of the Qur'an. What was it that persuaded the Apostle John of the intensity of God's love for mankind? To what does he appeal to prove this magnificent love of God towards men of which he speaks? What had God ever done to manifest his love in such a way that he could be spoken of as the epitome of love itself? It is simply this

"In this is love, not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation of our sins". 1 John 4:10

Herein lies the proof of the depth of God's love towards us. He has done the greatest thing he could possibly do to reveal his love for us - he gave willingly his very own Son Jesus Christ to die on a cross for our sins to redeem us to himself. No greater proof of God's love can be given to mankind than this. It is no wonder that John does not appeal to anything further to make his point. He has given the very best possible proof of God's love towards men.

How may we understand the depth of this love? Let us go back in history to the prophet Abraham who was commanded by God to give his only son in a sacrifice. If we ask why God chose to ask his son of him rather than

his cattle, goods or land, the answer must be that a man's own son is very different to these other things for he proceeds from his father and is part of the father's very own being. He is accordingly dearer to his father's heart than anything else. Therefore the best way that God could test Abraham's love for him was to command that he sacrifice his son for him. For surely, if Abraham would give his son for God, he would give him all things. This is precisely what mankind can, discover about God's love for the human race in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the remission of our sins:

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"
Romans 8:32

Furthermore we may well ask whether God would ever ask any man to express his love for him in a greater, more heart-rending way than God was ever disposed to show his love for men. When God asked Abraham to give his son, was this not surely a sign that a reciprocal demonstration of God's own love would follow in the gift of his Son for us? If not then we must conclude that one man gave a greater proof of his love of God than God has ever given for the whole of mankind in return. The thought is unthinkable. God would never ask any man to do more for him than he was willing to do for men himself. And the wondrous manifestation of his love in giving all he had in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ is proof sufficient of this.

What better proof can we want of God's love for us? He has given his Son for us - one who proceeds from him - surely, then, he will give us all things with him. If he has, in his deep love, given us the greatest of all gifts, we must assuredly know that he will give us all lesser things as well. Furthermore we see that Abraham, a lowly creature, was prepared to give one like himself for the eternal God of the universe. It was his duty to obey any command God gave him. But what duty was imposed on the eternal Father of the heavens when he gave his Son - one like himself in every way for lowly men on earth? What other than infinite love could have motivated such action?

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life". John 3:16

The Father did not stand idly by as men put his Son to an awful death, nor did he in an act of cruelty make an innocent victim of him. Oh no! Both the Father and the Son, in one united display of wondrous divine love for mankind, endured separation from each other to ensure that many men might be saved from an eternal separation in hell and be brought instead into eternal communion and glory with them. Nothing else but love could have endured the cross with all its horrors. Here we have a visible expression of God's love for us. In the gift of his Son he has given a full manifestation of the depth of his love towards us:

"God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us". Romans 5:8

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him". 1 John 4:9

Surely men can now respond to God with unlimited love in their hearts. Here is the glory of the Biblical revelation of the love of God in Jesus Christ. It is hardly surprising that the Qur'an has so little to say about the love of God when it denies that God gave his Son to redeem us from our sins. It has denied the greatest manifestation of this love that could ever have "been given by God to men. As Jesus said:

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". John 15:13

This is the greatest and most abiding form of love - love that is as strong as death (Song of Solomon 8:6) and cannot be overcome by it. Such love was revealed in Jesus Christ when he willingly laid down his life:

"When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end". John 13:1

Here we have proof, not only of God's inestimable love, but also of the fact that we can depend on it forever. The true Christian will never know a whit of God's wrath for he is the eternal object of his immeasurable love. The willing gift of his own Son was perfect proof of the truth of this promise:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love". Jeremiah 31:3

The cross of Jesus Christ was a magnificent proof of the eternal love of both the Father and the Son for mankind. Each was prepared to endure the loss of the other's presence - a circumstance which we cannot possibly estimate in our minds - so that we might never be lost. Not only so, but it is little wonder that after the death of Jesus and his resurrection to life again three days later God is only known as Father in the Holy Scriptures. This inexpressible gift shows us more than anything else ever could that God is indeed willing to become our Father. Through the cross he has redeemed all true believers in his Son to himself and has made possible even now the forgiveness of all our offences so that we might be transformed from children of wrath, which we are by nature, into children of God.

Not only has God become our Father through that which Jesus has done for us but, being the eternal Son from the Father, he has in fact revealed God himself to us as well:

"He who has seen me has seen the Father". John 14:9

Therefore, not only do we see God's love made manifest in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ but we also have the glorious privilege of seeing in him the very personification of God's love. We are able, in all that Jesus said and did, to obtain a very full knowledge of the love of God for us. For no man ever loved as this man did. No deity of any other religion compares with him in his inexhaustible love for men. He lived for them and he died for them. His whole life was a living expression of love. He never once avenged himself on his enemies but loved them to such an extent that he even prayed on the cross for them in these words:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". Luke 23:34

He gave his disciples such a remarkable revelation of love in all that they saw him do in the three years he was with them that he was able to say to them on the last night that he was with them:

"A new commandment I give to you; that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another". John 13:34

He ordered them to love each other as he had loved them. The world had never seen such depth of love as it saw in this man. Therefore, when he commanded his disciples to love one another in the same way that he had loved them, it was indeed a new commandment because the standard of this love was such as the world had never known before. Even others, who were not his disciples, when they saw how he grieved over the loss of one of his followers through an untimely death, said:

"See how he loved him!" John 11:36

We have, therefore, in the life of Jesus a wondrous example of the measure of the Father's love for us. As Ramsey, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, once put it so well: God is Christlike, and in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all. This is an incredible statement. Yet in no other way can the extent and wonder of God's love properly be expressed. The Father in heaven is the One whose image the Son bears (as we say in a proverb, "Like Father, like son") - therefore that love which was so great which the Son fully expressed in his life and death was nothing more or less than the Father's own love for us. Not only so, but the Son lived among men and was known by them. Surely, therefore, if the Father was revealed in the Son, then anyone who truly knew him knew his Father also (John 14:7). This means that we can not only have the magnificent privilege of beholding the love of God for us in the gift of his Son - a fact which demands the only reasonable response that men can give to this revelation of love, namely that we love him in return with all our hearts - but also that we can have the wondrous joy of actually KNOWING the love of God within our very own hearts. God himself has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ - by this we can not only perceive the expression of his love for us but also gain opportunity to actually experience that love within us. This leads us to our last consideration - the way by which God's love has become mutual between him and men - something which not only gives us potential to express heartfelt love for God but even to develop it to the full through the experience of his love for us in our own hearts.

5. Knowing God's Love through the Holy Spirit

Because God is our Father, we are able to have genuine love in our hearts towards him. Through his great work in his Son Jesus Christ we have seen how worthy he is of that love. But now, through the Holy Spirit (which is

given to every true believer in Jesus Christ) we are able to actually experience his love for us within our hearts. As the Apostle Paul put it:

"Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us". Romans 5:5

What a wonderful statement this is. God's love has actually been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which is given to every one at that moment that he turns and puts his faith in Jesus, seeking salvation in him alone. Not only do we behold God's love, therefore, for us in the gift of his Son but we can actually experience it within our own souls through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. This principle of our adoption as children of God through Jesus Christ and our living experience of this relationship in the Holy Spirit was summed up by Paul in these words:

"But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'" Galatians 4:4-6

Here we have the climax of the revelation of God's love towards us. We have become children of God through the work of Jesus Christ whom God sent into the world to save us from our sins. But now, by sending the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, he has made us conscious right within our beings of our status before him. Not only are we children, we know we are children. We have been brought into the very same eternal, intimate communion that the Father and the Son have shared with each other from all eternity. Just as Jesus was able to call on his Father in heaven with an expression of intense intimacy, namely "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36), so we have now been brought, by the mercies of God, into this same intimate relationship. ("Abba" is a Hebrew word which means "Father" but which is not translated into English because we have no corresponding word in our language which can possibly express the intimacy and closeness denoted by this word in Hebrew). Sufi Masters of old claimed to know the hundredth name of God (there are ninety-nine al-asma al-husna, "beautiful names" of God according to traditional Islam) but, in our view, if there is indeed another name of God which is missing from the ninety-nine, it is not the hundredth name but the first - namely this one: Father.

Within our very own hearts God has made us conscious of our relationship with him. As Paul put it:

"When we cry, 'Abba! Father!', it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God". Romans 8:15-26.

Christians, through the Holy Spirit, are able to call on God as their Father, a title which represents their relationship with him as no other really can.

The Holy Spirit within us has made us particularly aware of the fact that God is now our Father and we, therefore, call on him as such out of the deep knowledge of the love that he has for us. He is our Father in the very closest manner that he could be and through his Spirit he has impressed this fact very surely on us. All this has been done through the redemption which he set forth and accomplished through his Son Jesus Christ. By dying for our sins to cleanse us from all evil Jesus has made it possible for us to fully enjoy this new relationship.

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father". Ephesians 2:16

Through him the Christian has obtained access to this grace in which he now stands. The love of the Father, made manifest in the Son, has now become our own personal possession through the Holy Spirit which he has given us. Jesus himself urged his disciples to strengthen and develop this love in their hearts:

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love". John 15:9

We cannot tell how deeply the Father, through the Son, desires that we should know this love in our own hearts. When Jesus prayed to his Father in heaven on the last night he was with his disciples he made it clear that his whole purpose in coming to earth was to make this love real to them:

"I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them". John 17:26

Ten days after the ascension of Jesus to heaven his disciples first received the Holy Spirit. From that day the personal knowledge of God's love has become available to all men. All who turn to him in faith and love through his Son Jesus Christ will not fail to discover the joy of salvation that accompanies the consciousness of this love in our hearts. As Jesus said to his disciples again on the last night he was with them:

"For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father".
John 16:27

Here, then, we find the final proof of God's love towards men. By becoming our Father he has made it possible for us to express genuine love towards him without fear of his wrath in our hearts. He has shown his love to us in a remarkable way by giving his Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from our sins. By giving us his Spirit he has made it openly possible for that love to become thoroughly mutual between him and us. In turn we are now able to truly love him with all our hearts, souls and minds. He is worthy of such love and has made it possible for us to express it to the full.

What will a man offer to God in return for such love? Can he give anything to compare with it? After all that God has done for us, can we honestly believe that we can merit favour with him through our own half hearted, feeble religious efforts?

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned". Song of Solomon 8:7

God does not want from sinners their pilgrimages, prayers and religious devotions and various ecclesiastical duties mixed through and through with the evils they think and do every day. He cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly (Isaiah 1.13). If we hope to obtain his good pleasure by anything we do on our own account, while we casually overlook the sins we commit, we scorned utterly the love he has revealed to us.

The Father wants none of your efforts - he wants YOU. He desires that you respond to this glorious manifestation of his love. This wondrous revelation of the love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has been given to the world so that God may obtain from us that which alone is acceptable to him. He wants us to become his children and to love him with all our hearts, souls and minds. Any good work of grace or religious deed that flows out of such love is acceptable to him. But no work other than this can ever merit acceptance with him.

So many, with no certainty of forgiveness, offer religious works to God with the hope of thereby obtaining his approval and forgiveness. But how can our paltry efforts, wrapped in the multitude of sins that we commit every day, ever possibly merit his approval?

God has provided a better and more certain way of gaining his commendation. He who turns away from his own works and trusts in Jesus Christ instead obtains forgiveness of his sins and newness of life. The true Christian dies in the assured knowledge of God's love and favour. Will you not rather turn to him who can save your soul? God stretches out his hand to you in eternal love - will you not clasp it and obtain the salvation God is freely offering you? Will you not believe in his Son who died for you so that you can become a child of God? Will you not receive the Holy Spirit so that, like an orphan, you can experience his warm embrace and know in your heart that God is your Father?

"That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ". 1 John 1:3

The Temple, The Ka'aba, and The Christ

by John Gilchrist

There are three great monotheistic religions in the world, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these not only recognises the existence of one sovereign God who rules the universe but has sources and roots

common to the other two. All three admit that human history began when God created Adam and Eve and continue to agree on the immediate course of this history after the creation.

The initial temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, the great flood of the time of Noah, and the calling of prophets such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are admitted by all three religions. Nevertheless the distinctions between these three religions are far more significant than their points of agreement. Each one of these three claims to possess the ultimate revelation of God and while Christianity and Islam acknowledge divine influence in the monotheistic religions which preceded them, they both make exclusive claims to have superseded the earlier faiths and to be in this age the final revelation of God to man. At the same time Judaism and Christianity have conceded nothing to the religions which have followed them, holding firmly to their claims to be God's only true religion in the world.

One of these religions is indeed the true religion of God. All three may trace their religious histories to the same sources but, by virtue of the sharp divergences between them, they cannot all be true religions in this age. If there is indeed only one God, there can only be one true religion - one faith that alone can give men access to the presence, knowledge and favour of God. It is unthinkable that he could be the author of three religions which differ so radically in this age. In this booklet we intend to examine the focal points of these three religions and to compare them with one another to discover which religion really offers mankind access to God in this age. Judaism claims that Moses was its real founder but the focal point of the Jewish religion was not its prophet but the Holy of Holies - a shrine which contained a manifestation of the divine glory which was initially a portable edifice but which, from the time of Solomon, became a permanent structure and central feature in the Temple of the Jews. This Temple stood in Jerusalem until forty years after the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven and is known in Islam as *baitul-muqaddas* (the "holy house"). It is spoken of in the Qur'an as *al-masjid* ("the Temple") in Surah 17.8.

In Islam it is another structure which is the focal point of identification for the Muslim with God, namely the Ka'aba (known in Islam as *baitullah* the "house of Allah"). All Muslims face this house when they pray and are obliged to make a proper pilgrimage to it at least once in their lifetimes if they can afford it. Like Moses, Muhammad is only considered to be a prophet and while his name will appear over a photograph or poster of his tomb in Medina, it is always the name of Allah that appears over the Ka'aba. Hence the Ka'aba has become for the Muslim world its source of identification with God.

For the Christian Jesus Christ himself is the focal point of the Christian faith and the meeting-place of God with man. Therefore the Christian has no "house of God" on earth to perform the function of identification with God but looks to Jesus in heaven to perform this office. Accordingly he has become the *qiblah* of the Christian Church and all prayers to God are therefore offered in his name.

We shall proceed to compare these three to discover which one really offers men access to God in heaven.

The Temple of Judaism

When the Jews were first delivered out of Egypt during the time of Moses, God chose to move and dwell among them in a special way. He ordered Moses to arrange the construction of a tabernacle in these words;

"Let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it". Exodus 25.8-9.

In the very heart of the tabernacle there was a small ark with a wooden mercy-seat on top of it. This portion was the holiest part of the tabernacle and was to be separated from the rest of the tabernacle by a veil. God commanded Moses to construct it as such in these words:

"The veil shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. You shall put the mercy-seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place". Exodus 28.33-34.

God's transcendent holiness demanded that no access of any form should be allowed to man in the Holy of Holies. A visible cloud of glory by day and fire by night rested over the mercy-seat. On only one occasion a year, on the Day of Atonement, the Jewish high priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies to offer the blood of a

sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of his people. (Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first high priest. He is named in the Qur'an Harun). It was only the blood of the sacrifice, a symbol of atonement, which allowed the high priest into the holiest portion. On all other occasions men were to stay outside the Holy of Holies because men are sinners and no sinner was allowed to stand before the presence of the Holy God of Israel. The veil before the holiest place was a frank and abiding reminder of the gulf and separation between God and his people. Nevertheless it pleased God to reveal his glory among his people in the centre of this shrine. God spoke of this holy place as follows:

"There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. And I will dwell among the people of Israel, and will be their God". Exodus 29.43-45.

1. THE ORIGINAL TEMPLE OF SOLOMON.

When the Israelites came to Canaan (later known as Israel and Palestine), this shrine remained with them and was at all times the holiest place for the nation. During the succeeding centuries it was housed in a tent at various places but the prophet David, during his reign as King of Israel, decided to ensure that a permanent structure would be built to house the ark and the mercy-seat. God prevented him from building such a shrine during his lifetime but promised that it would be built by his son Solomon:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name". 2 Samuel 7.12-13.

As soon as David died, Solomon became King of Israel. At the beginning of his reign he declared:

"I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to David my father, 'Your son, whom I will set upon your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name'." 1 Kings 5.5 Solomon built a great Temple to house the ark and mercy-seat. God promised that his divine presence would continue to remain with the people of Israel in the Holy of Holies which now became a cubic structure in the centre of the Temple. This building was a magnificent edifice and was built with gold, hewn stones and cedars from as far afield as Lebanon. When it was completed Solomon ordered the chief priests to bring the ark of the covenant to the Temple and it was, at his command, placed in the most holy place in the centre of the building (1 Kings 8.6). When the priests came out of this holy place in the middle of the Temple,

"A cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord." 1 Kings 8.10-11.

With great joy Solomon blessed God and praised him that his divine presence was to be manifested henceforth in the Temple he had built. He declared his joy in these words:

"I have built the house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. And there I have provided a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the Lord which he made with our fathers when he brought them out of the land of Egypt". 1 Kings 8. 20-21.

Immediately, conscious of the fact that however splendid his Temple was, it could not possibly reflect the glory of God or contain his eternal being, Solomon added this prayer:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built! Yet have regard to the prayer of thy servant and to his supplication, O Lord my God, hearkening to the cry and to the prayer which thy servant prays before thee this day; that thy eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which thou hast said, 'My name shall be there', that thou mayest hearken to the prayer which thy servant offers toward this place. And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant and of thy people Israel, when they pray toward this place; yea, hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place; and when thou hearest, for give". 1 Kings 8.27-30.

In acknowledging God's omnipresence, Solomon nevertheless expressed his desire that God should be honoured at this place and that every Israelite, no matter where he might be, should face toward the Temple when he prayed. In time the Temple became not only the qiblah of the Jews but the centre of all their major festivals as

well. Sacrifices had previously been offered only at the tabernacle and now could only be offered at the Temple. Accordingly Jews flocked to Jerusalem at the major feasts to offer the necessary sacrifices and draw near to God in communal worship. God's presence was manifested in the Temple and so it was proper for the Jews to face the building containing his presence whenever they prayed to him.

Solomon's Temple lasted about three hundred and fifty years and was finally destroyed when Jerusalem was sacked by the armies of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (the incident is referred to in the Qur'an in Surah 17.7). Judaism was no longer the religion it had been in Solomon's time. Israel had turned her back on the Lord and the people had opposed and rejected the prophets he had sent to them. As a result of this tragic national apostasy, God withdrew his presence from the Temple and gave it over to the hands of Israel's enemies.

2. THE TEMPLE AT THE TIME OF CHRIST.

Even though Israel proved faithless, God remained faithful and sixty years later the Temple was rebuilt. It probably did not possess the grandeur of Solomon's Temple but was nevertheless built on the same lines. Once again the Holy of Holies - a cube-like structure - was constructed in the centre of the Temple. God continued to show his favours to the nation of Israel at this time and his presence remained in the Temple.

At this stage it will be useful to point out that God favoured no other nation as he favoured this one. From the time of Abraham, and especially from the time of Moses until the time of Jesus, the Jews alone were the recipients of his particular providential favours. Therefore the Temple rightly became the focal point of Judaism and no other nation on earth had a "house of God" for it was here, and here alone, that the divine glory was manifested. The Bible and the Qur'an have the following to say about God's favours to this nation:

"To them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. Romans 9.4-5.

And verily We gave the Children of Israel the Scripture and the Command and the Prophethood, and provided them with good things and favoured them above all peoples. Surah 45.16

Accordingly the Temple was the only true "house of God" in the world. The second Temple stood for nearly five hundred years. Gradually, however, Israel forsook the path of God and apostasy again infected the nation. On this occasion they did not turn to idols but abandoned spiritual worship and substituted it with numerous religious formalities which had the form of godliness but denied the spiritual power which these formalities were intended to represent. They had their sacrifices, ablutions, times of prayer, festival days, Temple worship and the like, but true godliness - holiness, love, truth, humility and honesty in the heart, had departed from them.

Shortly afterwards Herod, the King of Judea, decided to rebuild the Temple. This new building took at least forty-six years to complete and rivalled Solomon's in material splendour, but that is as far as the comparison goes. No cloud of divine glory filled this Temple. Once again the Holy of Holies with its veil was erected and once again it stood as a testimony to the wide separation that existed between the Holy God of the universe and sinful men on earth.

But whereas the religion of Moses had been like a rich, multi-coloured garment, being endowed with spiritual splendour, the garment had by now become worn out. It had lost its colour and Judaism had become a lifeless and colourless religion of petty religious rituals and formalities. The covenant God had made with Moses was practically obsolete and the Temple was ready to pass away. Significantly this Temple was not built by a faithful prophet of God but by a Gentile overlord who ruled over the Jewish race.

About this time Jesus was born in Bethlehem which is near Jerusalem. He lived for thirty-three years and the Temple had much significance in his life and ministry as we shall see shortly. Forty years after his ascension to heaven, however, the Temple of the Jews was destroyed by the armies of the Roman governor Titus. Not one stone was left standing upon another.

Although nineteen centuries have passed since then the Temple has never been rebuilt. It never will be. It will never again be a symbol of God's presence among men on earth. Something greater has come (Matthew 12.6).

By the mercy of God men have obtained a better form of access to the divine presence and this access is now available to all nations. Judaism lost its true nature and is no longer the religion of God on earth. Both Islam and Christianity claim to possess that which has superseded it. But these two religions are so different in character and emphasis that they cannot both be the possessors of the new covenant Which one is in this age the final revelation of God to men? Let us begin by examining the equivalent of the Temple in Islam, namely the Ka'aba in Mecca, to see whether Islam offers that final, complete form of access to God which replaced the Temple of Judaism.

The Ka'aba of Islam

Anyone who has studied comparative religion cannot fail to be struck by the similarities between the Temple of Judaism and the Ka'aba of Islam. The photographs in this booklet show very clearly the resemblances between them. Just as the Temple had a large courtyard which was surrounded by porticoes, so the Haram in Mecca has the same features. And in each case we find a cubic structure in the centre (the very word "Ka'aba" means cube) which in both religions appears as the holiest place on earth. Furthermore, just as Jews came from all over the world to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, so Muslims come on pilgrimage to Mecca to pray and worship in the Great Mosque in the centre of the city.

Likewise, as Jews turned towards Jerusalem when they prayed (1 Kings 8.30) to unite in worship of the one true God, so all Muslims face the Ka'aba in Mecca when they pray in accordance with the teaching of the Qur'an (Surah 2.150). The function and design of the Ka'aba in Mecca is so remarkably similar to the Temple in Jerusalem that one cannot help but conclude that this is not a coincidental phenomenon. Clearly there is a link between them. Furthermore the forms of prayer and the fact of pilgrimage in Islam today are practically a perpetuation of the Jewish forms in pre-Christian times (though the actual rituals of the pilgrimage resemble the pre-Islamic rites of the pagan Meccans rather than the forms of worship at the Temple in Jerusalem).

1. ITS RELEVANCE TO SOLOMON'S TEMPLE.

The issue which we have to consider here is whether the Ka'aba has in fact become, by God's appointment, the replacement of the Temple in this age. The obvious similarities between them can lead one initially to conclude that such a substitution has indeed taken place, and to speculate whether God has, perhaps, taken the true form of worship from the sons of Israel and delivered it to the sons of Ishmael. Certainly the resemblances between the two appear, at first sight, to give some support to this contention.

Nevertheless, when the issue is considered in detail, and when all the facts are carefully compared with one another, the only possible conclusion that can be arrived at is that the Ka'aba, on the contrary, is definitely not that which God has provided as a better means of access to his presence than the Temple of the Jews which stood in Jerusalem.

Firstly, the Qur'an does not claim that the Ka'aba, at the time of the destruction of the Temple, became the centre of true worship. It claims in fact that the Ka'aba was built before the Temple by Abraham and his son Ishmael as a house of worship for God (Surah 2.125-127). The Qur'an, in fact, alleges that from the time of Abraham the Ka'aba became, by God's command, the holiest place of worship on earth:

We made the house (at Mecca) a resort for mankind and a sanctuary, (saying): Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood (to pray). Surah 2.125

Nowhere in the Qur'an is it suggested that the Ka'aba replaced the Temple as the true house of worship. While the Qur'an acknowledges that the Temple was in fact the house of worship for the Jews while God favoured them above all nations (Surah 17.7), it nevertheless claims that the Ka'aba was built before it as the first sanctuary for mankind (Surah 3.96). Therefore it cannot be claimed that at the time of the destruction of the Temple God instituted the Ka'aba as the true place of worship on earth. Such a sequence of preference is precluded by the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was in fact built before the Temple. In fact we saw in the last chapter that the Temple, during its history, was the only "house of God" on earth and this fact seriously undermines the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was built by Abraham long before the first Temple was ever built by his descendant Solomon.

Secondly, we find that when Muhammad first prayed in Medina his qiblah was Jerusalem and not Mecca. He faced the site of the Temple rather than the Ka'aba. (In addition to the mihrab facing Mecca there is also a mihrab in one of the mosques in Medina to this day giving Jerusalem as the qiblah in commemoration of this fact). Indeed the Qur'an itself alleges that Muhammad's decision to face Jerusalem was a result of God's express command to this effect:

We appointed the qiblah which ye formerly observed. Surah 2.143

It was only as a result of the opposition in Medina from the Jews that Muhammad changed his qiblah to Mecca. What is most significant about this incident is that the Prophet of Islam himself, nearly six hundred years after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, chose this place as his initial qiblah - and that, according to the Qur'an, at God's command.

Furthermore he faced a place where no shrine stood. A bare piece of ground which had supported the Temple centuries earlier was, according to the Qur'an, preferred by God to the Ka'aba in Mecca. This incident also seriously undermines the Qur'an's suggestion that the Ka'aba was built by Abraham - if it was, why did God command Muhammad to face Jerusalem? It also most certainly shows that the Ka'aba did not replace the Temple. Even though the Temple site had been derelict for centuries, the very Prophet of Islam was commanded to prefer this place to the Ka'aba in Mecca. If the Ka'aba had replaced the Temple, assuredly no such command would have been given. The simple answer would have been to face it right from the beginning as the qiblah. It cannot be suggested that God chose Jerusalem in preference to Mecca simply because the Ka'aba was, at that particular time, a shrine of idol-worship. For the command to change the qiblah to Mecca in the Qur'an predates by many years the conquest of Mecca. During all those years when Muhammad faced Mecca, the Ka'aba remained a shrine of idol-worship.

Thirdly, secular history in no way supports the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was ever a place of monotheistic, non-idolatrous worship. The first mention of the Ka'aba is found in the writings of Diodorus Siculus who, about 60 BC, described it as a "temple greatly revered by the Arabs". Accordingly the Ka'aba dates back at least to before the time of Christ. But this fact only helps to support the final conclusion we shall draw in this chapter. It certainly does not in any way suggest that the Ka'aba existed before the Jewish Temple. On the contrary, before the time of Muhammad, the Ka'aba was only known as the principal shrine of pagan idolatry of the Arab world in and around Mecca.

We do have clear evidence, however, that the Ka'aba is not of monotheistic origin. We refer to the black stone built into its east corner known as al-hajarul-aswad. Before Muhammad's time the Arabs worshiped stones and the black stone was one of these objects of worship. Not only was the kissing of this stone incorporated into Islam, but the whole form of the Hajj Pilgrimage today is fundamentally that of the Arabs before Islam. Muhammad only changed the meaning of the formalities - he made no attempt to change the forms and rites of the pilgrimage themselves.

Some have suggested that stone-worship among the Arabs arose out of veneration of the black stone, but this is highly improbable. Any form of veneration of a dead stone - especially to the extent of bowing down and kissing the stone - can only be identified with pagan idolatry rather than pure monotheistic worship. Even Umar was reluctant to imitate the pagan Arabs by kissing the stone and only did so because he saw Muhammad do it. But in our view Muhammad likewise was only perpetuating one of the forms of Meccan idolatry and we cannot possibly see how veneration of a form of idol-worship can be reconciled with the worship of the one true God.

Secular history knows of only one form of pre-Islamic veneration of the Ka'aba and that is the idolatry of the pagan Arabs. There is no corroborative evidence whatsoever for the Qur'an's claim that the Ka'aba was initially a house of monotheistic worship. Instead there certainly is evidence as far back as history can trace the origins and worship of the Ka'aba that it was thoroughly pagan and idolatrous in content and emphasis. Certainly in the six hundred-odd years between the destruction of the Temple and the final conquest of Mecca the Ka'aba was purely a shrine of thriving pagan idolatry. Therefore the Ka'aba cannot have become the form and place of true worship in God's providence when the Temple of the Jews was destroyed.

Fourthly, and most importantly, far from becoming a house of greater spiritual worship than the Temple, the Ka'aba in fact, and all the forms of worship around it, are positively of lessor import and effect than those of the Temple. Within the Holy of Holies the living, abiding presence of God was visibly manifested, but no such claim has ever been made for the Ka'aba. It is only a symbol of worship and has never been a place where God's definite presence has been literally revealed. A supernatural cloud overshadowed the Holy of Holies when it was first built as a sign of God's living presence in the Temple, but the Ka'aba can make no such claim for itself. Accordingly its importance in Islam is decidedly less than the Temple was in Judaism. While the Ka'aba is called the "House of Allah" (baitullah), the divine presence has never filled it as it did the Temple. Pilgrims are in fact allowed into the Ka'aba when the doors of the shrine are opened to them. Nevertheless we have admitted that the form of worship around the Ka'aba is linked to that of the Temple. But far from this being proof of the divine origin of the Ka'aba, the only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn is that the Ka'aba is in fact derived from the Jewish Temple. It has never compared with the splendour of the Temple but is remarkably similar to it in design and size. The form is repeated but not the splendour - this argues strongly for imitation. It is extremely likely that Arab proselytes to Judaism (there were many) spoke intensely favourably of the Temple when it existed and that the sons of Ishmael in Arabia felt it would be appropriate to construct a similar shrine to that ordained by God for the sons of Israel. This suggestion is strongly supported by the evidence that the Ka'aba existed before the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

Similar shrines existed all over Arabia at the time of Muhammad. One still stands at the al-Kabir mosque in Yemen. It is strikingly similar to the Ka'aba in Mecca.

In considering the chronology of God's dealings with mankind, one can only conclude that the worship which centres around the Ka'aba is at best merely an imitation of that which focused on the Temple. But although this worship resembles some of the forms of Jewish worship (for example, facing the shrine in prayer), it has far more similarities with the pagan rituals of the Quraish prior to Islam. In any event what it does not have is a manifestation of the divine glory confirming the presence of God himself as the Temple had. Therefore, far from being a replacement or substitution, it in fact lacks the very thing that gave the Temple its marvelous significance. The divine presence - a living reality - is not there. Accordingly we must reject the suggestion that the Ka'aba, and with it Islam, provides the fulfilment of that which the Temple foreshadowed. Instead of providing a superior and better form of access to God, it in fact provides no access to him at all and is inferior to the structure which stood in Jerusalem. The former shrine had at least a manifestation of God's presence among the people, even though they could not obtain access to him within the Holy of Holies, but the Ka'aba has never enjoyed a revelation of the actual presence of God within its walls.

It was at the time of Jesus Christ that the divine presence left the Temple in Jerusalem. Judaism lost its exclusive identification with God but the whole of mankind - Israel included - gained a better form of access to God. Let us now proceed to examine the life of Jesus, particularly those events and sayings of his which affected the Temple, to discover precisely how and where the whole human race has, in this age, gained this far greater access to the presence of God himself.

The Christ of God

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod the King. At the time of his birth the new Temple was being built in Jerusalem. Although it was being constructed under the auspices of a foreign ruler, it nevertheless conformed to the pattern of the original Temple and was accordingly a proper representation of the House of God in Israel. No prophet of God could disassociate himself and his ministry from the Temple of God and therefore we must expect to find some connection between Jesus and the Temple during his life on earth.

1. JESUS AND THE TEMPLE.

Shortly after Jesus was born he was brought to the Temple by his mother Mary and her husband Joseph to be dedicated in accordance with the law of the Lord (Luke 2.22). Every year thereafter his family visited the Temple in Jerusalem to observe the annual Passover festival (Luke 2.41). Nothing unusual happened at these feasts until Jesus was twelve years old. On this occasion he stayed behind in Jerusalem when the feast was

ended. It was customary for all the children to mix freely in the company of those who went up to the feast and it was only after a day's journey that Joseph and Mary discovered he was missing. They returned to Jerusalem and after three days they found him in discussion with the Jewish teachers and scribes in the Temple. Those men marvelled at his knowledge of the law of God for it was not to be expected that a young boy would have such an intimate knowledge of the law.

His mother, however, was distraught after searching for him for three days and she said to him:

"Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been looking for you anxiously". Luke 2.48.

Joseph, however, was not really the father of Jesus and his mother Mary knew only too well that she had conceived her son while she was still a virgin. Accordingly Jesus met this ill-considered reproof of his action with those words:

"How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" Luke 2.49

He expressed his wonder that Joseph and Mary had not sought for him right from the start in the Temple of God for it was, in his own words, "my Father's house". Mary should have remembered what the angel said to her when she first conceived him, namely:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High ... therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God". Luke 1. 32,35.

Two things, however, must be noticed in this incident. Firstly, Jesus identified himself with the Temple at a very young age and identified it as the "House of God". Secondly, he described it as "my Father's house" - something he was to do again twenty years later (John 2.16). By this we must of necessity conclude that God was, in a very real and eternal sense, the true Father of Jesus Christ.

The next connection that Jesus had with the Temple was during the forty days that he fasted in the wilderness of Judea after he was baptised. At the end of this period Satan tempted him no less than three times to turn away from the path God has chosen for him. One of those three temptations related directly to the Temple in Jerusalem:

Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the Temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'." Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'." Matthew 4.5-7.

Satan knew who Jesus was. Having heard Jesus describe the Temple as "my Father's house" and having also heard God describe him as "my beloved Son" at his recent baptism (Matthew 3.17), he now tempted him to prove to all the Jews gathered at the Temple that God was indeed his Father. Satan tried to persuade him to stand on the Holy of Holies and jump down in the sight of all Israel; for surely, if God was his Father, he would send his angels to save him lest he injured himself in the fall. If this were to happen, surely all the Jews would fall at his feet and acknowledge, in the very precincts of the Temple of God, that he was indeed the Son of God.

Jesus resisted the temptation and refused to yield to Satan's suggestion. This incident tells us much about the condition of the Temple at the time of Jesus. There must have been something radically wrong with the worship around it for the devil to incite Jesus to obtain by spectacular means the honour and obeisance of the Jews who were gathered there in that worship.

If the people had been drawn to the Temple through a deep spiritual desire to worship God in spirit and in truth and to have fellowship with one another in the knowledge of God, the last thing Satan would have wanted was the discovery by the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Messiah they had long awaited. On the contrary we must presume, from the fact that Satan did everything in his power to persuade Jesus to reveal himself publicly as the Messiah in the Temple precincts, that the religion of Judaism had largely become false and that their worship at the Temple no longer focused spiritually on God but in fact had become contrary to the purpose of God which was to draw all men in true worship to himself. Quite obviously the Jews had turned away from him even though they outwardly still conformed to the prescribed pattern of the Temple worship.

That this was indeed the case is clear from an event that took place on the very next occasion that the Passover feast took place in Jerusalem. Jesus went up to the feast and immediately reacted to the rituals and practices taking place in the Temple:

In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money-changers at their business. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and the oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; you shall not make my Father's house a house of trade". John 2.14-16.

Far from approving of the worship at the Temple, he displayed his utter opposition to what was taking place. God's house was meant to be a house of worship but they had made it a market for secular trading. The chief priests had transformed the Temple into a place of mercantile objectives. They sought only to obtain wealth at the expense of the many pilgrims who came regularly to Jerusalem to worship and observe the feasts.

Jesus cleansed the Temple as a sign that the true worship of God in future was to be revealed in his ministry. We can see now why he resisted Satan's temptation. When he finally came to the Temple, far from seeking to draw the honour and praises of the Jews to himself, he in fact opposed them to their faces and, by his actions, showed that he disapproved entirely of what was passing for the worship of God in its precincts.

Once again he described the Temple as "my Father's house". While he revered it as such, he displayed an open abhorrence of the affairs of the Temple which were supposedly being conducted in the name of God. A few years later, when he repeated this action, he accused the Jews of making the Temple "a den of robbers" (Matthew 21.13).

As was to be expected the Jews took strong exception to this action. On the first occasion they asked him what sign he had to show them that he acted on authority from God in entering the Temple and behaving as if he were the Lord of it. Jesus answered then:

"Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up". John 2.19

The Jews marvelled at this statement. They declared that it had taken forty-six years to build the Temple and were amazed at his suggestion that he could rebuild it within three days. But Jesus had not spoken of the Temple building. One of his disciples, who records this incident, tells us:

He spoke of the temple of his body. John 2.21

Yet, by describing it as "this temple" immediately after he had driven the money-changers out of the Temple building, it is no wonder that the Jews took his statement to refer to the building itself. This identification of his body with the Temple building was not coincidental, however, but was deliberately implied in his reply to the Jews. Henceforth the true Temple of God was no longer to be the building in Jerusalem but the person of Christ himself. From this moment onwards Jesus drew a clear distinction between himself and the Temple and many incidents in his life show that Jesus himself had become the new focus of true worship and had replaced the Temple as the meeting-place of God with men.

When Jesus left Judea to return to Galilee he passed by Jacob's well in Samaria which was not far from a town called Sychar (in what is known as the "west bank" of the Jordan river today). In this province lived a people who had a mixed ancestry, part of which was Jewish. They held that as the prophet Jacob had worshipped on Mount Gerizim, and not at the site of the Temple in Jerusalem, so they should do likewise. When a Samaritan woman asked Jesus which of the two was indeed the true place of worship, he replied:

"Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth". John 4. 21-24.

Be plainly told her that the hour had now come when the Temple in Jerusalem would no longer be the focus of worship. In his answer he clearly implied that no place on earth would fulfil this function. Now that Jesus had come, the situation was to be changed. His advent at this time heralded the new age when worship was to be directed not towards a place on earth (for example, Gerizim, Jerusalem or Mecca) but spiritually towards God in heaven.

On another occasion, when Jesus was reproved by the Jewish leaders for allowing his disciples to pluck heads of grain in his presence on the Sabbath, he replied:

"Have you not read in the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless? I tell you, something greater than the temple is here". Matthew 12.5-6.

If God allowed the priests to perform functions on the sabbath which appeared to profane the day, and were not censured by God even when this was done right in his presence in the Temple, so likewise the disciples were free from blame before God when they plucked these heads of grain on the sabbath in the presence of Jesus and were not reproved by him. Clearly Jesus was portraying himself as the replacement of the Temple and as the centre of the abiding presence of God among men. Something greater than the Temple was now here in the person of Jesus and we shall shortly see why this was indeed the case and how it came to pass.

A climax was reached when Jesus took his three closest disciples up a high mountain and was transfigured before them. His garments became white as light and his face shone like the sun. A bright cloud overshadowed him and a voice from heaven said:

"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him". Matthew 17.5

Centuries earlier this bright cloud of glory had settled in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle (Surah 2.57) and then in the same chamber in the Temple as a sign of God's real presence in the shrine. Now it settled above the person of Jesus as a manifestation of God's presence in him and as a proof of the fact that from henceforth God's presence and favour were only to be found in Jesus. All prayers and worship were from this time forth to be offered in his name and he had therefore become the "qiblah" rather than the Temple.

As he stood in the Temple for the last time at the end of his ministry, Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and foresaw the demise of this great building as the place where God was to be identified with his people on earth. Jesus declared to the multitude:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'." Matthew 23.37-39.

Immediately afterwards, as he withdrew from the Temple for the last time, he said to his disciples of the buildings in the Temple:

"Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another". Matthew 24.2

With these words Jesus pronounced God's judgement on the Temple. It was forsaken and desolate. For centuries the Jews had opposed the prophets God had sent to them and had practised a false worship around the Temple. Forty years later the Temple was duly destroyed by the Roman armies under Titus and so it no longer represented the presence of God among men.

2. THE ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MEN.

Jesus had become instead, in his own person, the centre of true religion on earth. The Temple had merely foreshadowed and anticipated his coming but he, ultimately, is the identification and focus of worship between God and men. The purpose of praying towards the Temple and of pilgrimages to its feasts within its precincts was a way by which God through Christ had sought to draw the worship of the Jews towards himself. But even when Jesus himself stood among them in human form they opposed and rejected him. Their religion centred on the Temple but not on him. In distinguishing between Christ and the Temple, and by preferring the latter to him,

the Jews lost the knowledge of God for it is in Jesus alone that the divine presence is ultimately revealed to men and through him alone that men can obtain access to God. Therefore he told them that their Temple was forsaken and that they would not in any way rediscover the path of access to God until they found it in him and admitted that he was indeed their Messiah and that the divine presence was henceforth to be manifested in him alone.

But how is this access obtained through Jesus to God? We must return to his saying, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" to find the answer to this vital question. Two days after Jesus pronounced God's judgement on the Temple he was arrested and put on trial before the Jewish leaders. Of all his sayings this one remained foremost in their minds. Two witnesses came forward and said:

"This follow said, 'I am able to destroy the Temple of God and to build it in three days.'" Matthew 26.61

But Jesus had said nothing of destroying the Temple himself. What he did say was that when they destroyed it he would raise it in three days - and by this he meant his own body as we have already seen. When they sentenced him to death and obtained permission to crucify him the following day, the sign Jesus had promised them was about to be fulfilled before their very own eyes. By having him crucified they were themselves destroying the temple of his body. Nevertheless, even as he hung on the cross others said:

"You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross". Matthew 27.40

Jesus, however, intended to fulfil this prophecy in a far greater way than by coming down from the cross. He hung on the cross for reasons unknown to these scorners. Without realising it, by their efforts to have him put to death they were helping to fulfil his prediction. As he died on the cross a remarkable thing happened:

The curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Matthew 27.51

The veil in the Temple which had for centuries signified that a sharp separation existed between God and mankind was torn from the top as an earthquake shook Jerusalem, signifying that God, from above, had torn down the barrier between men and himself through the death of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus had died on the cross not because he could not save himself but to save others from their sins. Three days later God raised him from the dead to fulfil the prophecy and sign he had given to the Jews. He had overcome death and had conquered the power of sin. He had bridged the separation between God and men and forty days later he ascended to the very presence of his Father in heaven above.

Ten days later the Holy Spirit descended from heaven in visible form, not into the Temple, but into the very hearts of the disciples who had gathered in Jerusalem to wait for this event. Something greater than the Temple was indeed here. By faith in Jesus his disciples gained direct access to God by the fact that the Holy Spirit came, not into a forbidden part of the Temple, but right into their very own hearts. Until Jesus comes again men will only be saved and obtain access to God through faith in him. It is God's plan to unite all things in him - things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1.10). This indeed was that which motivated Jesus to endure the cross far by this means he ensured that the last prayer he offered for his disciples would be answered:

"I do not pray for those only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." John 17.20-21.

Instead of facing the Temple and making pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Jesus desired, by his abiding presence in heaven, to draw men through himself directly to God in true spiritual worship. The Christian has no Temple or Ka'aba, no holy place on earth. Instead he has in heaven one who has gone before him right into the presence of God; and a holy city in the heavens ready to be revealed at the last time. The Christian has within himself, through the Holy Spirit which is given to him, direct access to God in heaven. Christ is in him and he is in Christ. By this profound mystery, he is actually represented in Christ who beholds and shares the glory of his Father without measure - and who has promised that that glory will be ours as well when he returns to earth at the end of time (John 17.24).

The torn veil was an everlasting sign that the death and resurrection of Jesus had broken down the barrier between God and men. Although the Temple had been a sign of God's presence in Israel, its stone walls and veil were really a reminder of God's absence from man. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a

year and then only with the blood of a sacrifice as a symbol of atonement. That symbol was fulfilled through the death of Jesus on the cross. Through him all true Christians have access beyond the veil to God himself.

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Hebrews 9.24

When the Temple was destroyed it was a permanent proof of the fact that the barrier between God and man was forever broken down. The Jew could travel all the way to Jerusalem on pilgrimage but he could only touch the stones of the building. He could not obtain direct access to God. But in Jesus, no matter where he may be, the Christian has this access right into the presence of God's temple in heaven.

For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2.18.

Therefore Christianity indeed possesses that which replaced the Temple. This shrine was laid low at the time of Jesus to allow for a far better form of access to God. We look not to a house of stone made with hands but to a living person like ourselves who is seated on our behalf at the right hand of the very presence of God in heaven. Jesus, in heaven, is indeed our "qiblah" All we do or pray is done in his name.

This shows that the Ka'aba is not relevant to God's dealings with man in this age. The Ka'aba, in its resemblances to the Temple, is only a symbol of the barrier that once existed between God and man - and also a symbol, perhaps, of the gulf that still exists between God and those that have not experienced renewal and access to him through faith in Jesus. Like the Jews before them, the Muslims can only touch stones; but in Jesus Christ we have access, through the Spirit he has given us, directly to God our Father in heaven. No cloud of glory filled or settled on the Ka'aba when Muhammad had all its idols destroyed after the conquest of Mecca.

The glory of God had settled on the Temple when Solomon dedicated it to God and later upon Jesus himself when he was transfigured but no such thing happened when Muhammad consecrated the Ka'aba for the worship of Islam. The glory of God, instead, will forever be vested in Jesus Christ and will be manifested again when Jesus returns at the end of time. This glory is also available to all who turn to God through faith in him. When he is revealed in all his glory, then the righteous too will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13.43). For this reason Jesus declared in the Temple itself on the great day of the Feast of Tabernacles:

"If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink". John 7.37

We look, not to buildings made with stone on earth, but to the best of qiblahs, a living Saviour who has given us direct access to God, Jesus Christ himself. In the words of Peter, one of the closest disciples of Jesus, we appeal to all Muslims:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious. 1 Peter 2.4-5.

In him, Jesus our Lord, salvation, forgiveness of sins, the knowledge of God, the assured hope of glory and the indescribable anticipation of eternal life are vested. He alone is the "living" stone, in him alone will men ever find access to the living God of heaven.

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4.12.

Will you not forsake vain things which cannot profit or save by turning away from rites and ceremonies which concentrate on stones and other lifeless objects and turn instead to the living way which brings eternal life? Will you not turn to him, to Jesus Christ, and so become a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed? Will you not submit your whole life to him and follow him as your Lord and Saviour? He is alive in heaven and is ready to receive you now. Will you not commit yourself to him and receive the living Spirit of God which he is willing to pour into your heart?

Eid-ul-Adha: Abraham and the Sacrifice

by John Gilchrist

Abraham and the Sacrifice

Islam celebrates two great festivals annually - Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha. The first is the great festival that follows the month of Ramadan when the fast is broken. The second occurs about two months later during the month of Zil-Hajj when an animal is sacrificed in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice of his son. This festival is incorporated in the great pilgrimage to Mecca which should properly be made during this month but it is also observed all over the Muslim world at the same time. The underlying importance of this festival is the spirit of sacrifice (qurbani) in memory of Abraham's great act of faith many centuries ago.

Eid-ul-Adha is, according to Islamic teaching, a time for Muslims to learn the value of self-denial by making a sacrifice of something living to God. It is stringently denied by most Muslim theologians that the sacrifice has any further significance and it is especially denied that religious sacrifice has any atoning or propitiatory value. Abraham's great act of submission is thus regarded solely as an example of genuine surrender to the will of God and is to be followed as such.

In this booklet we shall examine in some detail this great event in Abraham's life and will study all the circumstances around it to decide whether the Islamic negations of any propitiatory value or representation in the sacrifice of his son are justified, or whether there was not really some great underlying revelation in it.

We shall begin by making a study of Abraham's faith for it is very rarely realised just how considerably God tested his belief in his faithfulness and trustworthiness.

1. THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM.

The story of Abraham and the sacrifice of his son is of profound significance and the best way of obtaining the deepest knowledge of its meaning is to go through the life of Abraham from the very time that this son was promised to him to the end when this son became the progenitor of a great nation.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God spoke to him and said:

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves". (Genesis 12.1-3).

The Quran confirms that God gave this great promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations:

"Lo: I have appointed thee a leader for mankind". (Surah 2.124).

As Abraham left his country and was travelling through the land of Canaan (subsequently known as Palestine and Israel), God again spoke to him and said "To your descendants I will give this land" (Genesis 12.7). Later, when Abraham again came to the land of Canaan, God spoke to him and said:

"Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted". (Genesis 13.14-16).

Abraham must have marvelled at these awesome promises. He must have wondered very deeply about the future generations and have pondered at great length as to why he should be the father of so many descendants and why

they should be blessed through him. Presently, however, he was concerned about the fact that he had no offspring of his own. His nephew Lot had parted from him and his only heir at the time was a slave named Eliezer of Damascus. Therefore, when God spoke to him again, Abraham said:

"O Lord God, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir." (Genesis 15.2-3).

Immediately, however, God answered him and spoke these comforting words to him:

"This man shall not be your heir, your own son shall be your heir". (Genesis 15.4).

After giving him the tidings that he would have a son, God made him come out of his house and said:

"Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them". (Genesis 15.5).

As Abraham stared in awe at the myriads of stars above him on a clear night, God said to him: "So shall your descendants be". (Genesis 15.5).

God had promised him that he would give him a son-even in his old age - and that through this son he would give him offspring as many as the stars he could see in the sky. Now Abraham knew that it was not naturally possible for him to have a son because his wife was barren and "it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women" (Genesis 18.11). Furthermore he himself was to all intents and purposes too old to bear offspring through her.

Abraham knew, therefore, that God's promise could only be fulfilled if God himself supernaturally brought about the conception and birth of the son by the power of his Spirit. Abraham nevertheless trusted him whom he considered faithful to bring this about in his own wonderful way.

"And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness". (Genesis 15.6).

Why did Abraham believe God? Was he the kind of man who did not reason about difficult matters and preferred just to leave them to God to achieve though he could neither understand nor comprehend them in any way? Was fatalistic resignation Abraham's concept of surrendering to the will of God? No - this man Abraham is set forth in the Bible as the great figurehead of faith in a human creature whose example should be followed by all men (Galatians 3.9). He considered the promise, reasoned about it, came to a conclusion it was true, and then believed. We have a fine summary of his thoughts in this passage:

"Abraham is the father of us all, as it is written, 'I have made you the father of many nations' - in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told 'So shall your descendants be'. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness'." (Romans 4.16-22).

He reasoned carefully about the promise. He questioned whether it could be fulfilled. He could not naturally have a son but he knew that God was faithful and if God had promised to give him a son, then because of the faithfulness of God to his own word, the promise must come true. Abraham began with this precept firmly fixed in his mind:

"Every word of God proves true". (Proverbs 30.5).

Knowing this he believed that God would fulfil his promise. But he did not stop there - he reasoned further as to how God could bring this about. God would have to intervene in the natural order. He would have to cause something to happen which otherwise could not naturally take place. He believed, as Paul put it to the Roman

Christians, that God "calls into existence things that do not exist" (Romans 4.17). Because of this exercise of faith, because he reasoned carefully about the matter and did not just accept the promise fatalistically, he came to understand how the son would be conceived and in so doing gained a greater understanding of the mind and will of God as well. God highly commended him for this exercise of faith. Abraham did not believe, as some men foolishly do, that God can just do anything he pleases according to his arbitrary will and that no one can question his acts - even when what purports to be an act of God is altogether morally questionable. Abraham did not have such a low concept of God.

He believed that God is absolutely righteous and that he would never do something which human conscience would con-firm to be unrighteous. He knew that God, whatever he did, would always act within the bounds of his own absolute moral holiness and perfection. Some consider that this attitude limits the power of God to do as he chooses - not so Abraham. He believed in a God of eternal righteousness who was all the more exalted and glorified by his own refusal to choose to do anything that would go against his own love of righteousness and holiness. As he said on another occasion, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18.25). He knew that God's will is always good and acceptable and perfect.

He knew that it was within the moral holiness of God, coupled with his omnipotence, to bring about the son he had promised. So, as Paul said, after he had reasoned about this, "no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised". (Romans 4.20). This process of reasoning strengthened his faith so that he did not just believe the promise through blind, uncomprehending acceptance of God's word, but rather saw by his faith what was behind that word - God's ability to bring "into existence things that do not exist" and when he saw this, he understood the promise, he gained knowledge of the ways of God, and because he obtained this better comprehension of the nature of God and his works, he was able to believe with sound reason (and not blind resignation) the promise he received. He was justifiably "fully convinced that God was able to do as he had promised".

God commended him for this process of faith - and because he displayed his faith by carefully reasoning about the promise in the light of God's own righteous character, God "reckoned it to him as righteousness". Such is the faith God requires from us. Such was the faith of Abraham - and therefore he is set before us as the ideal example of a man who had true faith in God.

2. THE REJECTION OF ISHMAEL.

Ten years after God had first given his great promises to Abraham, his wife Sarah complained to him of her barrenness. So she suggested to him that he should bear offspring through her maid Hagar. (Genesis 16.2).

When Hagar had conceived a child, however, instead of remembering the circumstances in which she was able to bear it, she looked on Sarah with contempt and Sarah, grieved by this betrayal of trust, drove Hagar away into the wilderness. (Genesis 16.6). Nevertheless the Lord, in his perfect justice and mercy, commanded her to return to Sarah and at the same time promised that her descendants would be multiplied into a great nation as well. Then the Lord said to her:

"Behold, you are with child, and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen". (Genesis 16.11-12). When the child was born, Abraham did as the Lord had commanded and called the son Ishmael (meaning "God hears") and as far as he was concerned, this was the fulfilment of the promise God had given him. Accordingly he temporarily abandoned his belief that the promised son would be born of his wife Sarah. He looked on Ishmael with extreme favour, persuaded that he was the child of the promise.

For thirteen years Abraham looked on as Ishmael grew up. Ishmael had by this time almost reached adulthood and Abraham looked forward to seeing the beginning of the offspring he longed for who would herald the fulfilment of God's promise that he would give him descendants as many as the stars in the sky. But the first of a number of shocks, designed to really test his faith in the faithfulness of God, was about to confront him.

After thirteen silent years during which Ishmael grew to the threshold of manhood, God again spoke to Abraham and said these words:

"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly". (Genesis 17.1-2).

Once again God renewed his promise that he was to be the father of kings and nations (Genesis 17.6). With Ishmael now approaching adulthood, Abraham no doubt eagerly anticipated what God still had to say to him. But he was in for a surprise. God said to him of Sarah his wife:

"I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her". (Genesis 17.16). At first Abraham marvelled at this promise. Both he and his wife were now twenty three years older than they were when God first promised him that he would have a son. Was Sarah now to become the mother of nations? Was God to make his covenant with the son of his wife rather than the son of her maid after all? Abraham took surprise now that he should bear a son through Sarah his wife and said to the Lord:

"Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (Genesis 17.17).

But then, overwhelmed by his long expectancy of the fulfilment of God's covenant through Ishmael and struck by God's word that the son he had promised was to come from his wife Sarah, Abraham said to the Lord:

"O that Ishmael might live in thy sight." (Genesis 17.8).

O that Ishmael may be the apple of your eye, the child of your favours, he pleaded. But God said to him:

"No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him". (Genesis 17.19).

This must have been a bitter pill for Abraham to swallow. His hopes for Ishmael vanished like a mist. God promised that he would make Ishmael the father of a great nation after the flesh (Genesis 17.20), but his covenant - a richly spiritual one - was to be made through Isaac after the Spirit.

However deeply this might have affected Abraham, he was a deeply spiritual man and he was, as a man of true faith, concerned only about spiritual matters. Maintaining his faith without wavering, he again believed the Lord and began to look forward to the child who was to be born of the Spirit by the will of God. Accordingly he dismissed from his hopes the child who was born of the flesh through the will of himself, his wife and his mistress. From now on he anticipated the day when Isaac would be born to him.

God was so determined that his promise should be properly fulfilled that he ensured that Ishmael should not appear to be the child of his spiritual covenant. He had said to Hagar:

"He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen". (Genesis 16.12).

He shall be a "wild ass of a man", God said, meaning that he would be a thoroughly unspiritual man, a man of flesh and blood alone and born of the flesh alone. In every way he would be sharply contrasted with Isaac who was to be a deeply spiritual man, born of the Spirit by the special will of God.

3. THE BIRTH OF ISAAC.

God had not promised the birth of Ishmael to Abraham -he spoke of Isaac when he first promised that he would give Abraham a son through whom all the nations of the earth in the coming ages would bless themselves.

The Quran confirms that no tidings of the birth of Ishmael were given to Abraham but that Isaac alone was the son who was promised to him. The promise of the birth of Isaac is recorded in the Quran in these words: "And we gave him tidings of the birth of Isaac, a Prophet of the righteous". (Surah 37.112).

The Quran says nothing of any tidings being given about the birth of Ishmael but whenever it does speak of such tidings it always refers to Isaac or specifically names him as the son who was promised (See also Surah 11.71 as well where Isaac is again named as the promised son). It is wise at this stage to note that the Quran takes no issue with the Bible on the chain of events we have thus far considered and that, when it does refer to them, it plainly endorses them as we have seen.

God fulfilled his promise and Isaac was duly born when Abraham was a hundred years old. (Genesis 21.1-3). Nevertheless Ishmael took exception to Isaac and the favour of God upon him and began to trouble him while he played, envious of the blessings that had been promised to his offspring. (Genesis 21.9). The Bible says of Ishmael's treatment of Isaac:

"He who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit". (Galatians 4.29).

God's warning that Ishmael's hand would be against every man was coming true. He was seeking for his offspring after the flesh the blessings promised to Isaac's offspring after the Spirit. Sarah perceived this and said to Abraham:

"Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac". (Genesis 21.10).

Because Ishmael was born of the flesh and only of a slave woman at that, whereas Isaac was born of the Spirit according to the promise of a free woman, God commanded Abraham to hearken to the voice of his wife and to part from Hagar for Ishmael was not his true son, being born only of a slave woman (Genesis 21.12). Isaac, however, was the only son of his wife Sarah, the free woman, and God had promised "through Isaac shall your descendants be named". (Genesis 21.12). So from that day Abraham bid Hagar and Ishmael farewell and remained with Sarah and his only son by her, Isaac. The years went by and Abraham lived in the land of the Philistines. (Genesis 21. 34). Gradually, however, the intense anticipation of the fulfilment of God's promise began to possess Abraham again as he saw his son approach adulthood. Presently he expected to see some of those descendants God had promised him. As he had done many years before, Abraham eagerly awaited the fulfilment of his promise.

But if the rejection of Ishmael came as a shock to him, far worse was to follow now. God was nowhere near finished with testing and proving the intensity and degree of his faith. The final and great test was about to confront him.

4. THE COMMAND TO SACRIFICE.

After living for some time in the land of the Philistines, Abraham heard again the voice of God calling him by name "Abraham." (Genesis 22.1). Immediately he responded "Here am I". Filled with excitement at the prospect of knowing more of the effective realisation of God's promises to him, he eagerly awaited the message God was to give him. Was his son now to become the forefather of many nations?

With keen anticipation he expected some indication of the fulfilment of God's promise that he was to have descendants as many as the stars in the sky. But a sword was about to pierce his soul. For God immediately said to him: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you". (Genesis 22.2).

What a command this was: Ishmael had left him and Isaac alone was with him. With great awe and wonder Abraham received this command to sacrifice Isaac his son.

The Quran confirms the Biblical account of the sacrifice and also plainly supports the clear statement in the Bible that it was Isaac who was to be sacrificed. We read of Abraham:

"My Lord! Vouchsafe me of the righteous. So We gave him tidings of a gentle son. And when his son was old enough to walk with him, Abraham said: O my dear son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice thee". (Surah 37.100-102).

It is quite obvious that the son who was to be sacrificed was the same son whose birth was foretold. We have seen from other passages in the Quran that the birth of Isaac alone was foretold to Abraham and it is clearly this son who was to be offered up.

Secondly in the same Surah (37), we find a lengthy account of various significant incidents in the lives of the prophets of old who are all mentioned by name. In the case of Abraham, after the narration of the tidings of the birth of the son and the vision to sacrifice the same son, we read:

"And We gave him tidings of the birth of Isaac, a Prophet of the righteous. And We blessed him and Isaac". (Surah 37.112-113).

These verses are clearly a summary of the narrative about the sacrifice of Isaac by his father Abraham as a test of their mutual faithfulness to God throughout the whole ordeal until God provided a ram in Isaac's place. Clearly the Quran here agrees with the Bible in making Isaac the son who was to be sacrificed. Ishmael is mentioned elsewhere in the Quran by name (particularly in the passage about the construction of the Ka'aba where he is named as Abraham's helper - Surah 2.125) but is nowhere mentioned in this passage about the sacrifice wherein Isaac is expressly mentioned twice by name.

Accordingly it must be concluded that the Quran supports the Bible in making Isaac the object of the sacrifice. Certainly no fair and impartial exposition of Surah 37. 100-113 can produce the conclusion that it was Ishmael who was to be sacrificed in the vision that Abraham saw.

Abraham must have been struck with bewilderment when he first heard this command to sacrifice his son Isaac. If we suggested that he received this order without any emotional shock or immediate repulsion in his heart at what he was commanded to do, we would dishonour Abraham as a real man of God. We cannot believe that such a father who loved his son so much could automatically respond to the command with unaffected resignation to it or with a straightforward complacency with the divine will.

The very wording of the command shows that God did not expect it to be received without heart-rending astonishment but rather that he intended that Abraham should be shocked to the core of his great human soul. God deliberately placed emphasis on the nature of the price Abraham was to pay to fulfil this demand and quite clearly determined to test him to the extreme of his affections and love for his son and for God: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering". (Genesis 22.2).

What a tremendous trial of faith this was for Abraham. God put him to a severe threefold test - firstly to show his overriding love for God by giving that which was dearest to his heart and which could not be replaced, even his only son; secondly to maintain his trust in the absolute moral holiness and trustworthiness of God who he had hitherto believed would never will something that was evil or morally questionable; and thirdly to persevere in his faith in the steadfast faithfulness of God to his own promise that he would yet give him descendants through this son as many as the stars in the sky.

For some real faith implies an unquestioning resignation to what appears to be the will of God, no matter how improbable or morally suspect the exercise of that will may appear to be. Abraham was not such a man. He could not summarily abandon himself to the command to sacrifice his son without considerable reflection on its implications and circumstances. God confronted him with this awful test of his faith because God knew that this man would never go through with the command unless, as in the case of the birth of Isaac, he was fully convinced both of the moral excellence of the order and its thorough consistency with the promise that God would give him descendants as many as the stars in the sky.

The greatness of this man's faith is found in his refusal to believe anything unless it was credible - no matter who commanded it - and his determination to understand and recognise the credibility of that which appeared to be overpoweringly incredible - when the One who gave the command was the God in whose absolute holiness and faithfulness he had always trusted, the "Holy God who shows himself holy in righteousness". (Isaiah 5.16).

God would have been most unimpressed with Abraham's attitude if he had simply resigned himself to the divine will that his son should be sacrificed without any serious consideration of what was involved in the matter. God wanted him to explore at length the conciliation between the apparent horror of the command and the transparent eternal trustworthiness of the God who gave it- because through this he intended to reveal to him the glory of his salvation for all mankind which flesh and blood could never show to him.

5. ABRAHAM'S CONTEMPLATION OF THE COMMAND.

Abraham had reasoned very carefully about the promise that his wife would bear him a son. With this same inspired reasoning this man, who sought earnestly to gain as much understanding and knowledge as he could of the God he loved, through the commands and promises he was given, thought through the command to sacrifice his son according to the test God had set in a threefold form before him.

The first test - too often considered to be the only one before his eyes - was for this man the easiest of the three. He was required to prove that his love for God was unsurpassed by his love for anything else by giving up that which was dearest to his heart - his son Isaac. God did not require his possessions, goods or material wealth - he required that which Abraham could neither replace nor substitute, something of his very own being, his only son. Because he, as a true father, loved his son so much, it must have been a heart-breaking ordeal to part with him. But Abraham had already endured the command to part with Ishmael, his son by the slave woman. And because of his deep love for God, he resolved to obey God again and in doing so give up even his only son by his wife Sarah.

The other two tests were more severe, however. The first had related only to the nature of Abraham's love for God. The other two related to the nature of God himself! Firstly, in his time, Abraham witnessed with moral abhorrence and repulsion the manner of worship which his contemporaries offered to the idols they had created. To him the worship of idols was really offered to demons - and the formalities of this worship confirmed his beliefs about it. The worst idolaters offered their own sons up as sacrifices to their idols - and to Abraham this was the last word in human degradation and wickedness.

Now he was confronted with a similar order to sacrifice his own son to the God he worshipped in spirit and in truth. How could he reconcile this command with his belief that God was absolutely moral and holy? Abraham did not have the low concept of God that some men have. To these God's omnipotence allows him to do anything arbitrary as he pleases. To them any suggestion that God can only do what is morally and properly right is a restriction on his power to do anything he chooses. To Abraham such arbitrary acts, far from being proof of God's power, would be evidence of a lamentable weakness in his moral character.

Abraham had a high concept of God. He believed that God was absolutely holy and righteous and that he bound himself accordingly to do only that which was morally right and proper at all times. In the circumstances he was constrained to reconcile in his mind the moral holiness of God and the apparent contradiction of it that confronted him in the command to sacrifice his son.

Secondly he had to consider this command in the light of God's promise that he would have descendants as many as the stars in the sky. How could God fulfil his promise if his son was to die and be cremated before he could bear any offspring and descendants? Abraham was confronted with a command which at face value was morally questionable and which made the earlier promise apparently devoid of any possibility now of fulfilment. But as he set about considering all this, he was destined to resolve this whole matter in such a way that he was to find the significance of the sacrifice far more astonishing than its immediate implications.

He began by presuming that "Every word of God proves true" (Proverbs 30.5). Therefore that which appeared to be morally questionable must in some way be morally excellent -and he was determined to find out what that

excellence was. Secondly that which now appeared to be beyond the possibility of fulfilment must in the providence of God yet be fulfilled -and with these reasonings Abraham sought out the meaning of the command he had been given.

God at first had promised him a son through whom he was to have innumerable descendants. The promise consisted of two extremes - the birth of Isaac by God's intervention at the beginning, and countless descendants by his will and power at the end. In between these two suddenly came the command to sacrifice. Abraham could not believe that it was contrary to or destructive of the earlier promise he had received. God gave the promise - the same God gave the command to sacrifice. Because of his knowledge of God's total consistency in his acts, Abraham believed that the command to sacrifice, rather than violating the promise, was inseparably linked to it. He concluded that the miraculous birth, the sacrifice and the descendants were all linked together and that somehow the promise of descendants was dependent upon and was to be fulfilled through the sacrifice of Isaac.

There was only one way that Isaac could beget offspring after he was sacrificed - by God raising him from the dead. Abraham had realised earlier that Isaac could only be born through the power of God who could cause things to exist that do not exist. Therefore he concluded that if God could create Isaac out of nothing, he could also raise him from the ashes after he was sacrificed as a burnt offering. As Paul said of Abraham, he believed in God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4. 17). (The Quran confirms, in Surah 2.260, his faith that God could give life to the dead). Or, as another writer put it:

"By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, 'Through Isaac shall your descendants be named'. He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back". (Hebrews 11.17-19).

Abraham believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. This resolved the apparent impossibility of the fulfilment of the promise. It also led to Abraham resolving the moral issue as well. Abraham considered that the Isaac who was to beget all these descendants was to be a risen Isaac - one who could, in a resurrected body, fulfil the promise of God. When Abraham reasoned that the remarkable promise of descendants was dependent upon the renewed, remarkable condition of the son who was to beget them, he saw at last the moral excellence of the command. Somehow, only through a resurrection and a body which had overcome death, could the promise be fulfilled. Abraham rejoiced before God as, in a wondrous triumph of faith, he resolved in his mind the moral excellence and consistent nature of the command he had received - and the God who had given it. But although he now saw its practical nature, he was yet to discover its ultimate significance.

6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SACRIFICE.

Abraham, as we have seen, discounted the idea that faith was a bare surrender to the will of God. He believed that it required an exercise of reasoning so that the will of God could be understood and justifiably followed. But he also believed that such enquiring faith should seek out the mind and purpose of God behind his will and promptly proceeded to do this in respect of the command to sacrifice his son. Such is true, discerning faith and for such faith Abraham was deeply commended by God.

He began by considering what God had said to him "I have made you the father of many nations". (Romans 4.17). Because of his faith, God had made him both the prime example of true faith among men and also the father of the faithful. God approved both his faith and trust and accordingly decreed that those who had faith like Abraham were to become his sons and be blessed with him. (Romans 4.11-12, Galatians 3.7).

Because of his faith Abraham became the father of many nations. But, he reasoned, surely God is truly the Father of the faithful? And were not his faith and trust motivated purely by God's faithfulness and trustworthiness? He considered that his faith in God was like the reflection of the sun's light by the moon. For all its brilliance, the moon merely reflects the light of the sun, but the sun generates its own light. Abraham considered that his faith and trust were merely reflections of God's inherent faithfulness and eternal trustworthiness.

He saw his high status, therefore, merely as a reflection of God's great glory in heaven. He saw that, as father of the faithful, he was merely a type of the true Father in heaven. He then realised that if he was only a reflection and a type, then so were his son, the unusual birth, the sacrifice, the resurrection and the physical descendants. The whole process issued from a man who was merely a type of the real Father in heaven. Abraham was merely the physical reflection of the spiritual reality in heaven.

Abraham put it all together. The father was to have a son in this world born wonderfully of a woman by the Spirit and this son was to be a decidedly spiritual man all his days. Before he could have any descendants he was to be sacrificed as an offering to God, struck down by the hand of his own father. But he would rise from the dead and the risen son would beget descendants of great number through whom the nations of the world would be blessed.

By searching out the meaning of all this as he moved away from the reflection to the reality, Abraham was able to outline in his mind a glorious process of salvation that was to fill him with unspeakable joy. God, the true Father, was to send his own Son into the world, born miraculously of a woman by the power of his Holy Spirit, to be a man who would live solely by the Spirit he was to be born by- a man who spiritually would be the image of his eternal Father in every way. By his own eternally spiritual nature, he would transform men of all ages and in all nations from sinners of mere flesh and blood into saints of true spiritual dignity and would ultimately bring these offspring of the Spirit to eternal glory in the kingdom of God he had come to make available to them. But first he was to be sacrificed as an offering for sin. He was to burn within as he endured the wrath of God on behalf of sinners of every nation and in every age. He was to be struck down, not only physically at the hand of man, but spiritually by the hand of his own Father as he endured his wrath against the sins of men so that he might make a full atonement for them.

The Son of God was to rise from the dead, however, and the risen Son was to make available to men of true faith the Spirit of God so that they might become not only children of Abraham through the manner of their faith but spiritually children of God through the saving reality of that faith.

To put it plainly, in one glorious flash of inspiration and revelation, Abraham saw the whole of the Christian Gospel. By a faithful consideration of nothing more than two apparently contradictory divine statements, he worked out the whole of God's plan of salvation. When Isaac asked him where the sacrifice was, Abraham answered him with joy in his heart:

"God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son". (Genesis 22.8).

As he spoke to his son, he knew that God's Son was to become "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29). But as Isaac was one of those who was to become one of the objects of the atoning work of the Son of God, he could not ultimately be slain as his type. God only wanted a full shadow and reflection of the work of his Son to be formed in Abraham's mind. But for the perfection of the type, it was necessary that something figuring the work of the Son of God should be sacrificed instead of (and indeed in place of) Isaac. So a lamb without blemish, caught in the thicket, was slain instead as God stopped the human sacrifice and deeply commended Abraham for his steadfast faith, love and trust. (Genesis 22.11-13). For the Lamb of God was to be caught in the thicket of sin as he died as a sufficient offering once for all for the sins of God's true people. But, while he beheld by the eye of faith the redeeming work of the Son of God through whom all the nations of the world would be blessed, Abraham once again was reminded of the great blessings God had promised to his descendants. When the sacrifice of the lamb was over, God said to him:

"Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice". (Genesis 22.16-18).

Abraham realised that those who were to be redeemed by the work of the Son of God were in some way to be his descendants as well. Abraham was promised that all the nations would be blessed through his son - and, although he had seen that Isaac was only a physical type of the true Saviour, yet he knew that the real, effective

outworking of the promise had been made to his descendants through his son. Abraham realised that the Son of God according to the Spirit was to become his son according to the flesh - and that his real descendants were to be those who would obtain the blessings promised through faith in his greater son yet to be born. Abraham saw that his true offspring were not to be his sons by the flesh but his students by faith:

"It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants". (Romans 9.8).

From that day Abraham looked forward with joy to another age when his greater son would be born to redeem the world. In the fullness of time this greater son was born. As Isaac had been born of the Spirit of a barren woman, so Jesus Christ was conceived and born of the Spirit by a virgin woman. The true Son of Abraham had been born. But although Isaac had Abraham for his immediate physical father, Jesus had no human father, being descended from Abraham only through his mother and her line from Abraham. God was the Father of Jesus in an eternal and spiritual sense and whereas Jesus was the promised Son of Abraham, he was the real Son of God. Abraham knew that the Son of God was to be the real Redeemer of his many descendants and that which Abraham had looked forward to with great longing and joy had now come into the world.

When some of the Jews, arguing hotly with Jesus in later years, appealed to their status as the physical sons of Abraham in support of their claim that they were the heirs to God's blessings, Jesus reminded them that Abraham had vested his hopes, not in his immediate physical offspring, their forefather Isaac; but in his greater son after the flesh, Jesus himself, the Son of God according to the Spirit:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad". (John 8.56).

Abraham looked forward to the coming of Jesus, his greater son, to redeem the world from sin. It is for this reason that one of the first titles Jesus is given in the Gospels is "the Son of Abraham". (Matthew 1.1). He is the ultimate Redeemer -the one who was to really bring about that which was prefigured in the sacrifice of Isaac many years earlier. Both Jesus and Isaac were properly descended from Abraham according to the promise but as Isaac was really only the son of Abraham, the reflection, so Jesus is ultimately the Son of God, the true Father of the faithful, the reality.

Abraham, who exercised his faith and reasoned deeply in his heart about the command to sacrifice his son, saw the salvation of God in one glorious comprehension of the significance of the sacrifice. He foresaw the crucifixion of Christ and knew that it was to be the Son of God who was to be made a sacrifice for sin so that the blessings promised to Abraham and his descendants might become real to men in all nations who would turn to faith in Jesus:

"That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith". (Galatians 3.14).

God revealed to Abraham that he was to send his own Son Jesus Christ into the world, born of Abraham's seed as his greater son, so that the blessings he had promised to all nations might take real effect through the saving death of his Son on the cross and his subsequent resurrection to glory and honour at the right hand of God:

"And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying 'In you shall all the nations be blessed'. So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith". (Galatians 3.8-9).

But there remains one more thing to consider. God said to Abraham "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love" (Genesis 22.2). This called for the greatest manifestation of the love of Abraham for God - there was nothing greater that he could sacrifice to prove his surpassing love for God in heaven. He had to sacrifice something living that had come from him - something that would cost him far more than all his material possessions put together.

There is ultimately only one reason for this - God did not ask him to sacrifice his son just to test his love for him - rather it was through this that God desired to impress on Abraham how great his love was for him and all mankind. He was to send his only Son into the world to become a sacrifice for Abraham and all mankind as a glorious manifestation of his infinite, undying love for wayward sinners.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life". (John 3.16).

What greater sacrifice could a man make for God than to give his own son for him? What greater proof of God's love for man can be found than this - that he gave his only Son to die for our sins? And God only required that Abraham should contemplate the sacrifice. But God himself actually went right through with his love for men by giving his Son to die for our sins so that we may obtain the opportunity to possess eternal life through faith in him.

"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him". (1 John 4.9).

Just as Isaac willingly showed complacency with the will of God, so Jesus willingly of his own free will laid down his life for us. If God had redeemed us through anything he had created, it would have cost him nothing for he created it out of nothing. But God never asked any man to do more for him than he was prepared to do for men. He commanded Abraham to give up his own son who came from his own body. So God gave his own Son for us - one who was not created but whose blessed presence the Father had enjoyed from all eternity.

What a wondrous proof of God's love we have in this - that he gave his own Son to die for our sins. Abraham's exercise of love for God through the sacrifice of his only son was a magnificent shadow of God's love for us being made manifest through the sacrifice of his only Son.

Could God have tested Abraham's love for him any more deeply than he did by commanding him to give his own son as a proof of his love? Could the deep love of God for us be proved in any way greater than this - that he gave his Son to save us from our sins?

"He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (Romans 8.32).

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins". (1 John 4.10).

7. THE EID SACRIFICE RECONSIDERED.

Once a year the Muslim world commemorates the deep, wondrous love of Abraham for God in being willing to spare not even his own son to give a full, effectual proof of that love. Every day of the year, however, the Christian world remembers the deep, magnificent love of God for men in being willing also to spare not even his own Son to prove once for all his eternal love for us and his desire that we should not perish but, through faith in Jesus his Son, obtain eternal life.

With deep compassion we view the Eid sacrifice as an unwitting reminder of the revelation God gave Abraham of his salvation to come through his Son Jesus Christ which was to be fully foreshadowed in the sacrifice of Isaac. When we reflect on the sacrifice, should we remind ourselves of a man and his love for God, or should we not really see this whole matter in its true perspective and look to God and remind ourselves of his undying love for men? When Eid-ul-Adha comes again, will it once again be the love and faith of a man that impresses you, or will it be the transcendent love and faithfulness of God towards men that moves your heart to wonder and joy?

By exercising deep, penetrating faith, Abraham saw that God was to send his Son into the world to die as a sacrifice for our sins so that we might be redeemed to God. When he foresaw the coming of Jesus, he rejoiced with great joy in his heart at the redemption he was to achieve (John 8.56).

Today we look forward with exceeding joy to the return of Jesus Christ whom God has made the Saviour of the world. (1 John 4.14). We are the true sons of Abraham because we follow the example of the faith which he had by looking unto Jesus for our salvation from sin and its consequences to righteousness and a place in the kingdom of God. We are assured that the blessings which God promised him will be ours when Jesus comes again. As it is written:

"If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise". (Galatians 3.29).

Will you not also share these blessings with us by turning and putting your whole faith in Jesus, the Son of God, so that you too may enjoy forever the unspeakable riches of his grace and kindness towards us? Or will you continue to reject the love of God fully manifested before your eyes and become instead one of those with whom he is not pleased, those, who by refusing to put their faith in his Son, have incurred his anger and have gone astray?

The Muslim Eid sacrifice is a frank reminder of the great expression, not only of Abraham's love for God, but of God's great love for hell-bound sinners in giving his only Son to die for the sins of the world so that some, by forsaking their sin and by trusting in the Son, might be redeemed from the awful wrath of God and become instead the heirs of his grace. Such men alone are partakers of the life of God - all other men are the objects of his wrath.

"He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God has not life". (1 John 5.12).

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him". (John 3.36).

The Lamb of God

One of the characteristics of the writings of the Old Testament is the predictions of things to come in the future. In his many revelations to the men of old God continuously revealed what would happen in times to come. This is known as prophecy and it was through the prophets that God gave these revelations. As he said to the Prophet Isaiah

"I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you." (Isaiah 48.5).

It was the plan and purpose of God to reveal what he was going to do before he did it so that any sincere enquirer might know that, when it came about, it was truly an act of God as he had spoken long beforehand through the prophets of the event.

He also spoke beforehand to these prophets so that the generations following these events would not be misled by subsequent denials that the event was of God or had ever happened. An example of this is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In this age and for the past thirteen centuries there has been considerable controversy over this between Muslims and Christians. The crucifixion of Christ is one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith but is denied in the Quran.

There are hundreds of millions of Christians in the world who firmly believe that Jesus Christ was crucified while hundreds of millions of Muslims deny it. Both religions acknowledge the succession of prophets in the Old Testament and with the Jews recognise that all God's revelations of old were given to these men. Now, knowing that there would be such a dispute in later ages over the fate of this one man Jesus Christ, would God leave this whole matter hanging in the air, so to speak? It is not reasonable to conclude that he would and we are extremely privileged in having preserved for us the Old Testament documents and writings of those prophets who are recognised and acknowledged by Muslims, Christians and Jews. The issue of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is thoroughly canvassed in these writings and it is to them that we now turn to investigate the matter.

The Prophet David

We shall begin with one of the major prophets, the Prophet David (Dawud). We turn firstly to Psalm 22 where the crucifixion is prophesied by him.

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death." (Psalm 22.14-15).

A scientific study of the effects of crucifixion shows that the agonies of which David speaks are such as would be suffered by a man on a cross. Now David lived about a thousand years before Jesus Christ, long before crucifixion was ever invented, but here he does indeed prophesy the crucifixion of someone to come. That it was Jesus is obvious from the first verse of the Psalm which reads:

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22.1).

While he was on the cross Jesus Christ uttered these very words "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (See Matthew 27.46). The details of the crucifixion are also carefully outlined in the Psalm:

"They have pierced my hands and feet, they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them and for my raiment they cast lots" (Psalm 22. 16-18).

It was a common practice in Roman crucifixions to nail a man to a cross and thereafter a division of his clothing between the soldiers performing the deed took place. There is something in this verse however which merits closer attention. It was not common for lots to be cast for this clothing but David expressly predicts that this would be done in Jesus' case.

We turn to Mark's Gospel firstly where we read:

"And they crucified him (Jesus) and divided his garments among them." (Mark 15.24).

And in turning to the Gospel of John we find the fulfilment of the finer details of David's prophecy:

"When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be'." (John 19. 23,24).

The manner in which the details of the crucifixion were prophesied must strike any reasonable man who objectively seeks for truth. Foreknowing the many controversies that would arise, God spoke through the Prophet David of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and gave him minute details so that subsequent searchers for truth could have irrefutable and perfect knowledge of the plans and purposes of God.

We also read in Psalm 22:

"All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; 'He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him'." (Psalm 22. 7-8).

Here the one on the cross speaks of all those around him who are mocking him because of his total predicament and the apparent inability of God to save him. Who were these people?

"So also the chief priests, with the scribes and the elders mocked him." (Matthew 27.41).

"Those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads." (Matthew 27.39).

The Jewish leaders had at last secured the end of Jesus, so they thought, and unwittingly fulfilled David's prophecy and quote when they said:

"He saved others, he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said 'I am the Son of God'." (Matthew 27. 42- 43).

The Psalm continues to outline further even the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the deliverance of his soul from the finality of death and the ultimate glorification of his name but a study of this is not within the scope of this booklet. However, surely it does not fail to strike you deep within that the Christian belief in the crucifixion is based on the kind of evidence which even partial men cannot in any way gainsay? The predictions of his crucifixion have been drawn from this Psalm not in a way by which the verses have to be forced to yield the meaning sought after or by any inferences or submissions. Such tactics are unnecessary because the prophecies are as clear and detailed as anyone could wish them to be!

Another Psalm which clearly outlines the thoughts and details of the crucifixion is Psalm 69. Here too we see the very thoughts in the mind of Jesus Christ foretold a thousand years before. Other passages in the Old Testament with similar thoughts in the minds of the prophets are mentioned on the cover of this booklet (at top of this page). In Psalm 69 we read:

"More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause." (Psalm 69.4).

Jesus himself made it plain that this was said of him when he said to his disciples:

"If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law 'They hated me without a cause'." (John 15.24-25).

The Psalms are full of such prophecies but one last word from them will suffice to show that God has given to all men everywhere the clearest possible proof of the truth of the Christian doctrine of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ so as to leave without excuse those who deny it. We read:

"He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken." (Psalm 34.20).

It was also a common practice to break the legs of those who were crucified to hasten the death which would otherwise be protracted. This was especially the case where the Jewish Sabbath was approaching, At about 3-o-clock on the day of crucifixion we read:

"So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other who had been crucified with him; but when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. For these things took place that the scripture might be fulfilled 'Not a bone of him shall be broken'." (John 19.32,33,36).

The Prophet Zechariah

Another great prophet of old predicted the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and that was Zechariah (not to be confused with the Zechariah of the New Testament who was the father of John the Baptist and is the prophet "Zakariya" of the Quran). We read:

"When they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn." (Zechariah 12.10).

In John's Gospel we are told that instead of breaking Jesus' legs, "One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear." (John 19.34).

John makes it plain that this was a fulfilment of the prophecy in the book of Zechariah:

"And again another scripture says 'They shall look on him whom they have pierced'." (John 19.37).

The same apostle John reveals the fullest fulfilment of the prophecy when he says of Jesus:

"Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth shall wail on account of him." (Revelation 1.7).

Another great prophecy in the book of Zechariah was also referred to by Jesus himself. We read:

"'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who stands next to me,' says the Lord of hosts. 'Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be scattered'." (Zechariah 13.7).

Jesus referred to himself as the "Good Shepherd" (John 10.11) and on the night before he was delivered to be crucified he said to the disciples:

"You will all fall away because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered'." (Matthew 26.31).

When Jesus was arrested a little while later, the verse was fulfilled as all his disciples fled away from him. With David we now have a second prophet in whose writings we find the clearest possible details about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ foretold.

The Prophet Isaiah

Of all the great prophetic oracles of the Old Testament, none surpasses that of the Prophet Isaiah. In his writings are found the predictions of the birth of Christ of a virgin and likewise many revelations are given about him and his life.

In turning to his book, it should first be well considered how strong the arguments are for its total authenticity. Note these two points:

1. This book is wholly accepted by the Jews and is an integral part of their Bible. As will be seen, it contains numerous prophecies about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Seeing the Jews deny Jesus Christ, there can be no question of alteration or tampering with texts by Christians or Jews as the latter have nothing to gain by this.
2. Of the Dead Sea Scrolls, two were found which contained the complete prophecy of Isaiah. One has been dated around 100 BC. This scroll, now in a museum in Israel, is a standing testimony to the authenticity of the prophecies of the crucifixion of Christ in this book of Isaiah and of their pre-Christian origin.

The great prophecy in the book of Isaiah is that found in Isaiah 52.13 to Isaiah 53.12. There is such a wealth of prophecies that only brief comment can be made on this great chapter. This passage not only predicts the crucifixion as those we have perused already but it thoroughly shows the reason for it. Here is the revelation of God in its fullness.

God speaks and begins with these words: "Behold my servant" (Isaiah 52.13). He begins by calling the reader's attention to this one man Jesus Christ, God's beloved servant.

"Many were astonished at him - his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance." (Isaiah 52.14)

This servant of God was to suffer more than any other. Note that the past tense is used to describe this as if it had already happened. This is known as the "prophetic past" tense. It is written down as past because God has declared it and it will surely happen, so surely that it is written down as history already! So very sure was the prediction of the crucifixion.

"He had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... he was despised and we esteemed him not." (Isaiah 53.2,3).

Jesus came to his own people, the Jews, but was rejected by them. They did not esteem him as God's own servant because he had no outward appearance of esteem or dignity (as the world sees it) nor did he ever obtain any great position of secular leadership.

"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we esteemed him stricken." (Is. 53.4).

Because Jesus suffered the world declared that he was therefore stricken of God, presumably for sins or misdemeanours unobservable to the world. Such was a common attitude in his day. But Jesus was in suffering for others. He was crucified for the pains, failings and shortcomings of others. As Paul so decidedly put it and with a thought to this passage:

"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15.3).

So God, speaking through the Prophet Isaiah, now boldly proclaims that Jesus, the sinless one, would take the penalty due to others, the sinners, so that they could be saved for all eternity. We read:

"HE ... was wounded for OUR transgressions, HE ... was bruised for OUR iniquities, Upon HIM ... was the chastisement that made US whole, with HIS stripes ... WE are healed; All WE like sheep have gone astray; WE have turned EVERY ONE to his own way ... and the Lord has laid on HIM the iniquity of US ALL." (Isaiah 53.5-6).

The fullness of the prophecy in this great Chapter 53 of Isaiah is as follows:

1. He would not defend himself at his trial (Jesus did not): "He opened not his mouth."
2. He will die and be buried in a rich man's grave (Jesus was): "With a rich man in his death."
3. He would be sinless (Jesus is): "He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."
4. He will die as the great sacrifice for sin (As Jesus did): "He makes himself an offering for sin."
5. He will then be resurrected from the dead (Jesus rose again): "He shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied."
6. His death will bring righteousness to sinners (Jesus achieved this and is working it out in the lives of many today): "My servant shall make many to be accounted righteous."
7. In turn, he would die for sins (and this Jesus assuredly did): "He shall bear their iniquities."
8. He would lay down his life for sinners (He did): "He poured out his soul to death."
9. He would be crucified between two thieves and accounted as a criminal like them (This was fulfilled - Jesus was crucified between them): "He was numbered with the transgressors."
10. He would pay the penalty for the sins of many (Jesus did): "Yet he bore the sin of many."
11. He would pray for forgiveness for sinners: "He made intercession for the transgressors." From the cross Jesus cried out "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23.34).

There are many predictions of the crucifixion and details of its purpose in the prophecies of the Old Testament but this one passage from Isaiah is so full and substantial that it suffices for our purpose.

Jesus is the central theme of the revelations of the former prophets. Abraham rejoiced to see his day (John 8.56), Moses preferred to suffer abuse on his behalf rather than to enjoy all the wealth of Egypt. He saw the payment of his sins in Jesus Christ and he considered this greater wealth (Hebrews 11.26). The evidence is entirely conclusive. God has given to all men everywhere substantial proof of the truth of the Christian claims about Jesus and for every true seeker after salvation God has furnished in these writings the way of salvation in its completeness.

The Lamb of God

Not only is the crucifixion of Christ predicted in the oracles of the Old Testament prophets but we find that Jesus himself consistently foretold the death he was to die. He also gave the reason for it:

"The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
(Matthew 20.28).

It will profit us considerably to read through a number of other statements of Jesus about his death:

"The Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day." (Matthew 20.18).

"The bread which I shall give for the life of this world is my flesh." (John 6.51).

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down and power to take it again." (John 10.11,17-18).

"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the chief priests and the elders and the scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised, Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men." (Luke 9.22,44).

Jesus not only knew of the crucifixion awaiting him, he "set his face like a flint" (Isaiah 50.7) towards it and knew the exact moment when it would be:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? Father save me from this hour? No, for this purpose I have come to this hour." (John 12.27).

When the Jewish people rushed out of Jerusalem as he approached it for the last time to persuade him to go back, Jesus replied "It cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem" (Luke 13.33) and he pressed on. Later on he said "Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?" (John 18.11) and in this mind he resolutely faced the cross.

Not only did he know of his pending death on the cross, Jesus also recalled the prophecies which had been uttered centuries beforehand about it.

"Everything that is written of the Son of man by the prophets will be accomplished." (Luke 18.31).

Jesus knew the scriptures and clearly stated that all the predictions about the coming servant of God were to be fulfilled in him. The whole purpose and plan of God was that men should be redeemed by the perfect sacrifice of this one man from heaven, Jesus Christ. Entirely complacent with his Father's will, Jesus came to save sinners by becoming a sacrifice for them.

The crucifixion of Christ caught all the disciples by surprise. They had hoped for a material and social liberation from the oppression of the Romans and had expected that he would secure this for them. The very crucifixion

surprised them all and when his tomb was empty on the third day, they were all the more confused and when Jesus met two of them after his resurrection he rebuked them for their unbelief in the prophecies:

"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24.25-26).

The next verse tells us that "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24.27)

There was assuredly no excuse for these men. They had before them in their very own scriptures all the detailed predictions and prophecies concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Indeed there will be no excuse for any man who acknowledges that the line of prophets recorded in the Old Testament is correct, for their writings are recorded for all history and the truth of the Christian doctrine of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead is a subject not for debating but plainly for believing. Jesus confirmed this himself:

"Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled. Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." (Lk. 24.44,46).

In conclusion let us consider one last aspect of the prophecies of the crucifixion of Christ and then reflect for a moment on the purpose of it. In Isaiah 53 we read of the coming Saviour described as "like a lamb led to the slaughter" (v.7). In the call to the Prophet Abraham we see firstly God's revelation of his plan of salvation given when he told Abraham to sacrifice a lamb instead of his son. Then throughout the ecclesiastical history of the Jews thousands of lambs were sacrificed as types of atonement for sin. Now in Isaiah we read of the great Servant of God who was to come who was to offer himself like a lamb. It is to this man that God would draw your attention and when Jesus finally came John the Baptist exclaimed of him:

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1.29).

The Apostle Peter later said of Jesus Christ:

"The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired about this salvation; they enquired what person or time was indicated by the Spirit of Christ within them when predicting the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glory." (1 Peter 1.10).

While declaring the salvation which was to come through this Lamb of God of whom they spoke, all the prophets wondered about the identity of this saviour of the world. Today we know for a certainty that it was Jesus. With this complete revelation, what must a man do to obtain the grace of God and receive the full benefits of the forgiveness Christ obtained for men? We are told that no one will enter paradise but only "those who are written in the Lamb's book of life." (Revelation 21.27). How does one join this body?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16.31). By turning from every other way and every other path to an exclusive faith in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, you will be saved for all eternity. Outside of this way, there is no other path given through the prophets or any other way of salvation. God will receive you on the basis of a total committal to Jesus Christ and on this basis only.

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7.10).

This booklet presupposes that the Muslim reader holds to the orthodox Muslim belief that Jesus Christ was never put on the cross but was delivered before the crucifixion and that someone else was crucified in his place. Any reader who holds to the other belief that Jesus was crucified but did not die on the cross but came down alive may write for the following:

"Was Christ Crucified?" - A point by point reply.

"The Deliverance of Jesus - Resuscitation or Resurrection?" - An answer to *The Crescent and the Cross* by A.S.K. Joommal and M.O. Seepye.

Not only was the crucifixion of Christ expressly predicted in the Old Testament it was also clearly foreshadowed in many ways as well. Write for:

Booklet:

Abraham and the Sacrifice.

Pamphlets:

The Sign of Jonah.

Adam and the Creation of Eve.

Noah and the Ark.

The Ark of the Covenant.

The Life of Joseph.

Moses and the Brass Serpent.

Other literature is also available from the Publisher [MERCSEA](#).

Pamphlets presently available on the subject are:

Evidence for the Resurrection.

The Righteousness of God.

God's Plan of Salvation.

The Rich Young Ruler.

All these are available freely from the Publishers. A free Bible will also be sent on written request.

THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE

Author's Preface

This booklet is a publication of a study on the Christian doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ which I did for Christians a few years ago. That study has now been slightly revised as this booklet has been produced primarily with the Muslim reader in mind.

It is only a slight revision of the original study and has not been amended to be "acceptable" to Muslims in the manner in which many works have been designed in recent times to promote "dialogue" and "understanding" between Islam and Christianity.

Firstly I am persuaded that the presentation of our doctrine of the deity of Jesus Christ will never be able to do full justice to its subject nor glorify him of whom it speaks unless the full facts and proofs are presented in the strongest possible manner.

Secondly I am persuaded that the deity of Jesus Christ is an eternal truth. In no way can I compromise in proclaiming this truth, nor can I consider the reaction which may come from that proclamation. Nor can I entertain any considerations as to whether it will be "acceptable" to the reader. Truth is truth and must be proclaimed as such.

In presenting this truth to Muslims I realise that I have embarked on a collision course and know that my declarations strike not at the confession "La ilaha illa 'llah" in itself but rather at the roots of Muslim understanding of the meaning and limits of the Kalima.

However, as a Muslim will proclaim and defend the tenets of his faith, so the Christian likewise is constrained to present that which is fundamental to his faith in its fulness and in the clearest possible terms. I suggest that you read this booklet with a Gospel of John at hand. If you do not possess one, write to us for a copy.

John Gilchrist.

28th September 1976

The Way, The Truth, & The Life

"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is his name?', what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM'. And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'.'" (Exodus 3.13-14).

When Moses stood before the burning bush on Mount Horeb centuries ago he asked for the name of God. He did this because, in Hebrew nomenclature, a name revealed something about a person. For example the Hebrew name for Moses was "Mosheh" which came from "mashah" meaning "drawn out" and it was applied to Moses because Pharaoh's daughter drew him out of the bulrushes in the Nile river. The Hebrews knew of the covenant which God had made with Abraham and which had been renewed in Isaac and Jacob, but apart from the existence of the one true God and his favour upon the nation of Israel, they knew no more. After four centuries in Egypt which had seen them brought into dreadful slavery, the Hebrews assuredly wished to know more about their God. For this reason God answered Moses "I AM" so that the Jews would know who God is. The name used throughout the Old Testament for God is YAHWEH from the Hebrew "ehyeh" meaning "I AM".

Now what does "I AM" indicate? Much, to say the least. There is so much revealed in this expression. It indicates that God is unbounded in any way. He is not in any way confined by time. I AM he declares. He neither was in the past nor will be in the future. I AM, he declares. I AM the God of Abraham, he said to Moses. He transcends time and is unaffected by it.

"I AM", God declares. He is not bound by space. The expression denotes omnipresence. He is not limited by anything. There is a sense of eternal completeness in the expression. There is no hint of any limitation of power, knowledge or understanding. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. The completeness of the expression beautifully illustrates this. God is.

In his Dictionary of the Bible, Davis describes the expression as indicating "He who in the absolute sense exists and who manifests his existence and his character." "I" indicates absolute personality, "AM" a perfect and absolute existence. The further content and purpose of the expression is further seen in comparison to two other names given by God. "Elohim" is the description of God in his position as the creator, upholder and moral governor of the universe. "E1 Shadday", God Almighty, is the covenant God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of promise in whom one could hope. But "I AM" reveals God as personally interested in the affairs of his people, revealing the manner and character of his nature. As we turn now to Jesus we will consider his statements in this light, as compared to God who declares and speaks of himself: I AM.

The Gospel of John.

1. Jesus declares absolutely, I AM.

In the Gospel of John there are three ways in which Jesus uses the expression "I AM" with regard to himself. In a few cases, Jesus declares himself absolutely by this expression. In other instances he elaborates on a particular content of his deity and work through a statement introduced by the expression and he thirdly veils the expression in the present tense of a sentence where the expression in context nevertheless again declares his deity. We deal firstly with his absolute declarations as recorded in the Gospel of John.

(i). "Jesus says to her, I AM, the one speaking to you." (John 4.26).

This is a direct translation of Jesus' answer to the woman of Samaria who half-questioned Jesus in speaking of the Messiah who was to reveal all things. It is conventionally translated "I who speak to you am he" but we find a direct declaration I AM in the original Greek, the language in which John wrote his Gospel. The words are "ego eimi". The woman had said that the Messiah, who was called Christ, was coming. By this she meant the one who was promised, the Deliverer, the Saviour of the world, the anointed one of God, declared in the prophets to be the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Wonderful Counsellor, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9.6). Jesus said to the woman of Samaria, in essence, "The One who is even now speaking to you, that I AM".

It must be noted that this is the first occasion in the Gospel that this declaration is made. It is a beautiful climax to the narrative which thus far builds up to it. The Gospel introduces Jesus Christ immediately as the "Word of God", the "Light", the "only Son from the Father". John the Baptist described him as "One whom you do not know" (1.26) and the "Lamb of God" (1.29,36). He declares him to be the Son of God (1.34). Then Andrew describes him as the "Messiah" (1.41), Philip as "Him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (1.45). Then Nathanel describes him as the "Son of God, the King of Israel" (1.49) and so the glorious descriptions increase. Jesus, however, nowhere describes himself as anything but the "Son of man" (1.51, 3.13,14) until this great declaration where he himself finally declares just who he is and in so doing exceeds all the titles given in claiming deity. "Jesus says to her, I AM". The woman knew the Messiah was coming, he who would be the greatest man who would ever live. Jesus answers her "I AM". Need she ask further?

(ii). "I said therefore to you that you will die in your sins, for if you do not believe that I AM, you will die in your sins " (John 8.24).

This is again a literal translation of the Greek to bring out the full import of what Christ said. Again we find the declaration, EGO EIMI, meaning, I AM. Again we find Jesus Christ absolutely claiming deity and declaring it in the course of a discussion with the Jews about his relationship to their God whom he called his Father. The whole discourse with them wondrously contains the very manifestation of the deity of Christ as linked to the Father as opposed to the fleshly, devil-linked nature of fallen man. He began the discourse "I AM the light of the world" (8.12). This use of the divine name to begin his discourse is an example of the second way in which Jesus declares himself as mentioned above, that is, in reference to a particular quality of his nature or work. We will return to this verse.

Jesus concludes the discussion with the very words he began with: "Before Abraham was, I AM" (8.58). He began with a declaration of deity and so concludes his discussion. In between we have the statement which we are now examining and a further declaration in verse 28. How beautifully the use four times of the divine name clearly distinguishes the nature of the Son of man as one in the Godhead with his Father in contradistinction to the nature of his hearers whose very wills were directed to the nature of their father, the devil. Let us now consider this particular declaration. "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I AM", Jesus declares. In this very declaration of deity he tells them what it is they need to believe. He is not saying that they must believe that he is the Messiah, or that he is the saviour or a prophet; in no way is mental assent to these characteristics sufficient. It must go further than that. "Unless you believe that I AM", Jesus declares. He is saying in essence just this: God made man in his own image. All men have sinned and so have brought condemnation upon themselves, including you, my hearers. I have life in myself, it is I alone who can restore that lost relationship, it is I alone who can restore that life. Unless you therefore receive the life I have by believing on me, in me, through me, indeed partaking of myself as a branch does of its vine, you will remain in your fallen state and will die in it. Everything you hope to receive from God is vested in me. It is I alone who can bring you to the one whom you call your God for as He is, so I am. This is in fact what Jesus is saying.

John 3.36 also illustrates further what Jesus is saying: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." The contradistinction between Jesus and his hearers was very real, eternally so, but he came for the express purpose of removing it and gaining access to God for men. Hence his warning to them: "You will die in your sins unless you believe that I AM". His warning holds good for all men in all ages.

(iii). "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I AM". (John 8.28).

This follows immediately on his last exclamation and underlines the nature of Jesus as opposed to that of his hearers. He follows up his previous admonition now by saying that as they had rejected him, they would die in their sins and would thereafter come to the terrible awakening that the one they had lifted up on the cross as a criminal, a traitor, an impostor, was in fact the one who reigns on the very throne of God. The cross preceded the crown and they were unwittingly helping him to it. Man's sin would put Jesus on the cross. Their unbelief in him and his saving work would eventually bring them total destruction on the day when they came to know that this man was all that he claimed to be, one with the Father. Jesus himself said "I and the Father are one" (John 10.30)

and Jesus was now saying that when they had lifted him up, they would come to know that he indeed is one with the Father. All this was in answer to their question "Who are you?" (v.25). They did not know him now and they could not, being dead in trespasses and sins, but they were to lift him up as an impostor, a false professor, and when they did so they would come to know precisely who he is; indeed the very one who spoke to Moses, Abraham and the prophets on whom they set their hope.

As he stood with them in the flesh he was human like them and to them he appeared to be no more. Having been lifted up he now reigns in heaven. In spirit he now eternally manifests his unity with the Father and says of himself "I AM".

(iv). "Before Abraham was, I AM". (John 8.58).

A closer translation of the above would be "Before Abraham ever came into existence, I AM". This brings a distinction between the eternal existence of Jesus Christ and the creation of the man Abraham. The Greek word is "genesthai", meaning "to become". The translation I have used, however, succinctly brings out the depth of his statement. "Abraham was" - he was bound by time. At one time he never existed Then he came into existence and was bound by time in turn. Jesus says in effect, I am not bound by time. what does he say? Before Abraham was, I have been? No, he does not. The statement is quite out of tune with English grammar but we are dealing with Divine grammar! After the aorist infinitive clause "Before Abraham was", properly the perfect clause and tense should follow but does not. Jesus says BEFORE Abraham, I AM. He uses the present tense because he is eternal and always exists in the present as God does! He does not merely claim to have existed before Abraham, he claims to be eternally existent.

Not only does he claim to be eternally existent, he leaves his hearers in no doubt as to who he was claiming to be. They immediately took up stones to stone him for they considered that this was blasphemy. By doing this they showed that they had not failed to grasp the import of Jesus' claim. Have you grasped it?

Through the seed of Abraham God had given a great promise of life. Through his seed came Joseph who saved the other tribe leaders from death through famine, but he was not the Promised One. Moses delivered the whole nation out of bondage and slavery but it was not him either. Joshua led the Israelites victoriously into Canaan and they possessed the land but they were all now dead, as were the people of the time of Joseph and Moses. Despite their great works, none of these was the Saviour. How would he ever be distinguished or recognised?

"Before Abraham was, I AM". Here I am, Jesus declares, yet another of the seed of Abraham, except that I was before him, I exist eternally, and it was I in fact who gave him the promise. I AM. The Jews were told in the very clearest terms that their Deliverer was with them. How could they know him? "I AM", Jesus declares. All other men come from the dust. This man is from God. Could the Deliverer, the Life-Giver ever be greater than this One in their very midst? "We are descendants of Abraham" the Jews said (v.33) but they had to admit that Abraham was dead (v.53). They considered that they were secure because they were physically descended from him, but he was dead. It was one of his descendants who would bring them life, this was the promise of God. It was to this descendant that they should come and seek kinship. He was standing there with them, and they knew him not. Of all the opportunities men have ever missed in all ages, this was assuredly the greatest.

Over against Abraham's short span of life inseparably linked to passing time, Jesus declares his timeless present. Not only has he existed all through time, his existence in fact transcends time! In this statement "Before Abraham was, I AM", we obtain a beautiful illustration of the substance and essence of God's word to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM".

(v). "Jesus says to them, 'Fear not, I AM'." (John 6.20).

Most translations of the original Greek text do not record the literal statement which Jesus made. The immediate statement in its context (Jesus' reply to the terrified disciples who saw him walking on the water) does not appear to make sense so it is usually translated "It is I". But this is not what Jesus said. The Greek words are 'EGO EIMI, me phobeisthe', that is, 'I AM, you fear not'. I am what? we ask. This once again is the whole import of the

remark. If Jesus had said "It is I", his disciples might have said "It is Jesus - look at this, a man walking on water!" But this was no ordinary human being performing supernatural nautabatics. "I AM", Jesus declares.

Jesus is in effect saying - Why be afraid? I am the Lord of this water, even the winds and the sea obey me. You, the water, and the boat you are sitting in are only upheld by my word of power.

Matthew's Gospel records that Peter then replied "Lord, if it is you, bid me to come to you on the water" (Ch. 14.28). But Peter would not have considered walking himself on the water had he not fully grasped the significance of what Jesus said. If he had just said "It is me, Jesus", Peter might have thought "I wonder how he has managed this" but would not have known how to do it himself. But Jesus said "Be of good cheer, I AM, fear not" (Matt. 14.27 literally translated). Immediately Peter grasped the significance of the words I AM. It is Jesus, yes, but he is claiming to be far more than that he is just a man. He says, I AM. He can walk on water and can control it. He can make me do it!

Peter's faith followed on the declaration I AM and Jesus became the object of Peter's faith when he grasped the significance of it. A similar occurrence is recorded in Matthew's Gospel. Jesus said to his disciples "Whom do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16.15). The Greek literally translated is "Whom do men say that I to be"? This is merely the impersonal form of I AM, the Greek word being 'einai', meaning 'to be'. Peter replied "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Jesus commended him for this statement, saying "My Father in heaven has revealed this to you".

By a similar revelation Peter grasped the significance of the words of Jesus as he walked on the water, I AM. Peter's reply, literally translated, is "Lord, if YOU ARE, command me to come to you on the waters". He did not say "If it is you". The whole impact of the story is lost in that expression. It implies that Peter was saying "If the person coming towards me is you, Jesus, call me to you" and the impact is lost. No, Peter heard Jesus say I AM and replied "IF YOUE ARE", that is, if the fulness of deity really dwells in you bodily - Peter knew it was Jesus, he was not enquiring of his identity but of his deity - if you Jesus are the One who spoke to Moses, who divided the waters of the Red Sea, who brought water from a stone and are now walking on water, then command me that I may also walk on it! This is the full import of Peter's question, and once again the full content of the incident is only realised as we consider the declaration of deity, "I AM".

(vi). "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I AM". (John 13.19).

This is now, in John's Gospel, the sixth declaration absolutely of the deity of Jesus Christ. Again the words are EGO EIMI. It is usually translated "I am he" but there is no "he" in the original Greek.

Throughout his ministry Jesus had been telling his disciples that he is the Son of God, that is, that the whole fulness of deity dwells in him bodily. Now he is introducing the event that was to follow later that evening. One of the disciples would betray Jesus, resulting in the humiliating death of the disciples' Master as a criminal on a Roman cross. This would most certainly shake their faith in him to the core. How could the Son of God - he who again and again declared I AM - suddenly be cut short and be handed over to men? How could mortal men end his life by crucifying him? Later they would know the answers to these questions but Jesus does not answer them now. He merely reaffirms their faith in him. He states that he knows it is about to happen and in fact this is the very purpose for his coming into the world. He tells them it is to fulfil the scriptures (v.18). He tells them that although one will betray him, it is no surprise to him, for he knows whom he has chosen.

Jesus said "I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I AM". He was telling them in advance so that when the time came they could remember and say, Oh yes! He said it would happen. Their faith in him as the very Son of God should not be shaken because he had forewarned them. It was no surprise or crushing defeat, it was all part of the working of God's plan, as he said, "that the scripture may be fulfilled". So therefore, they should not doubt in their minds about him.

"That you may believe that I AM", in other words, 'I have said to you before that I AM, I tell you this now that you may continue to believe that I AM', lest they consider him to be merely a martyred prophet like John the

Baptist, Zechariah, and others who were martyred. Jesus emphatically declares his deity again so that their faith in him as all that he claimed to be, the very I AM, the one who spoke to Moses now incarnate, might be sustained unaffected by the tragic and seeming defeat that suddenly interrupted his ministry.

(vii). "Jesus therefore knowing all things that were to befall him came forward and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered him 'Jesus the Nazarene'. Jesus said to them, 'I AM'. Judas who betrayed him stood with them. When Jesus said to them, 'I AM', they drew back and fell to the ground. Again therefore he questioned them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said 'Jesus the Nazarene'. Jesus replied, 'I told you that I AM, if it is me that you seek, let the others go'." (John 18.4-7).

This is the last occasion in John's Gospel that Jesus declares his deity in this manner and fittingly so for it was from this moment that their hour had come, the hour of darkness. The Son of man was betrayed into the hands of sinners and from now until his expiration on the cross he was voluntarily in the hands of men. This is not the last declaration as such for we shall see that a further occasion is recorded in Luke's Gospel, but as the Gospel of John reveals that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in whom all the fulness of deity dwelt bodily, it is appropriate that there is here the greatest manifestation of his deity just before he handed himself over voluntarily to the Romans and the Jews.

Again there is much contained in the declaration that is born out in the circumstances. Firstly the prophethood of Jesus is born out by the first I AM. Then he declares himself to be the King of kings and they all fall back and thirdly we see the great eternal High Priest lovingly taking care of his own and becoming a sacrifice for them. In all this the nature of the glory of Jesus Christ is shown but the whole source of it is revealed in the words I AM. The soldiers had come to arrest Jesus but without anything more than just two words, Jesus repelled them. "All he said was 'I AM'; but it was fully sufficient to overpower and overawe them. It was the enunciation of the ineffable name of God, by which he was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3.14). It was a display of his divine majesty. It was a quiet exhibition of his Divine power. It was a signal demonstration that he was the Word (John 1.1)! He did not strike them with his hand - there was no need to; he simply spoke two monosyllables and they were completely overcome." (Arthur Pink - Exposition of the Gospel of John, Volume 3)

They sought "Jesus the Nazarene". They were confronted by the Word of God himself. Jesus deliberately declared his deity at this very moment to show that he could not be touched unless Divine power was given over him from above. He showed that he was offering himself up voluntarily. Secondly it left his persecutors without excuse. Jesus declared his deity to them and offered up himself to them. What did they do? Did they glorify him, worship him, bow down before him, prostrate themselves, abhor themselves, as sinners in his presence? No, they led him away to be crucified. They did to him whatever they would. Therefore they could not say that they were not aware that they were crucifying the Lord of Glory. He exhibited his majesty and immediately they laid their hands upon him. Jesus left them in no doubt, however, as to who he was.

2. Jesus declares the content of his deity.

This is now the second way by which Jesus declares his deity in the expression I AM. The first category consists of those declarations which are absolute. Now Jesus proclaims the various functions in which his deity / humanity performs to unite men to God.

(i). "I AM the Bread of Life; he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst". (John 6.35).

This is the first declaration in this category. Like many others it is the foundation and the key scripture of the whole passage. It is repeated again in v.48 and is varied in v.41 ("I AM the bread which came down from heaven") and v.51 ("I AM the living bread which came down from heaven").

The emphatic "I AM" by which he introduces himself as the bread of life indicates deity. We have to go back to v.32 to discover the import of his claim.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven." (John 6.32).

Firstly we must consider the comparison the Jews were drawing between Moses and Jesus. For forty years bread came down from heaven to feed the Israelites. Jesus had just performed his miracle of feeding 5000 people with only a few loaves and two fishes. But what did that prove? He had at least had some bread to start with, Moses had none, and he only increased it whereas Moses brought his bread down from heaven! After all, had not Elisha fed one hundred men and to spare from only twenty loaves of barley? (2 Kings 4.42-44).

So the Jews reasoned among themselves but Jesus then brought out one fact that they had overlooked: "it was not Moses who gave you the bread". He was only the instrument but God was the Giver. And Jesus now draws the complete comparison in that, firstly, the bread was only given through Moses as an instrument; and secondly, it was not the true bread but only a type of that to come.

It is here that the second consideration comes. "My Father gives you the true bread from heaven". The first contrast is between Moses as the earthly instrument and Jesus as the heavenly bread. Here comes the second contrast: the bread in the wilderness brought temporary nourishment to the flesh and even then "Your fathers ate the bread in the wilderness and they died" (v.49). But the true bread from heaven "gives life to the world" (v. 33) and that living bread was Jesus Christ himself.

Moses was only a man, his bread only physical and material. Jesus was the true and living bread from heaven - he who feeds on him obtains eternal life - and this is the vital distinction. "If any one eats of this bread he will live for ever" (v. 51).

"As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself". (John 5.26).

Here the inclusion of his deity in the discourse is fully revealed. The fathers in the wilderness were of the flesh. Bread of the flesh sustained their earthly existence. Jesus, however, is the bread which is of God; that which sustains forever those who are of God and have heavenly life. Men of the world need the sustenance of the world to maintain themselves. Men of God need to be sustained by life itself as food. The Father has it in himself obviously. He has granted to the Son, not by imputation or privilege, but to have life in itself within himself. So Jesus could claim "I AM the living bread which came down from heaven".

(ii). "I AM the Light of the World; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8.12).

The statement "I AM the light of the world" is repeated in John 9.5. Initially Jesus declared that he is the bread of life, now he promises the light of life. The first indicates spiritual sustenance, the second moral enlightenment. Jesus, however, does not say "I am the light of life" but says "I AM the light of the world".

The deity of Jesus Christ is exclaimed in this declaration as it was in that of the bread of life for the same reason. Jesus, being deity / humanity, brings men to God. As the true bread he restores life; that is, he brings men right back into the presence and favour of God because he is both the Son of man and the Son of God. It is true that as he gives the light of life he opens the eyes of men so that they may see - "I came into the world that those who do not see may see" (John 9.39) - but now he claims to be the light "of the world" and so he excellently proclaims his deity.

He speaks not simply as one who makes the blind to see, but as he who reveals God in his moral perfection to an immoral and deceitful world lost in its own darkness, content to hide behind it, and refusing to acknowledge its moral blameworthiness.

"The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world". (John 1.9).

The evangelist had said earlier "In him was life, and the life was the light of men". (John 1.4). Does he refer to the enlightenment only of those who believe? Jesus does indeed limit possession of this light to those who truly follow him, but why does he say he is the light "of the world"?

If we read John 1.4 and 1.9 in context we shall see why. "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made". (1.3). John also tells us that "God is light" (1 John 1.5) and looking at John 1.3 above, we see Jesus not in his capacity as the one through whom men are saved but as the one through whom they are created. He is light. The world walks in darkness because it does not know the glory, majesty and moral perfection of God. Through sin the world has become blinded to the eternal glories and goodness of God and the standards which he set for men to follow. Jesus said "I AM the light of the world", that is, I reveal the glorious perfections of God to all men and in so doing I show that men by nature are walking in darkness and their sins are made manifest.

The statement followed on a very clear practical illustration. The Pharisees had just brought to Jesus a woman caught in adultery. In the law Moses commanded that such should be stoned. Because she was caught in a physical breach of the law she deserved to die. But what of the Pharisees? Were they not also sinners before God? No, they considered themselves fit to be the accusers, judges and executioners of this girl. She had transgressed the law, they had not. Outside of the law they knew no light and their own blameworthiness before God they subtly concealed before men. Jesus said to them "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her". (John 8.7).

We read that when they heard this they went away. Only Jesus and the woman remained. He alone was without sin and he alone could have any say in her fate. They came bringing a sinner under the law. They departed sinners under the light.

Even God's holy laws do not convict some men of their wretched condition but when confronted with the very light of God which exposes every sin, none can stand and this was the very thing that happened in this incident with Jesus.

So Jesus went on to proclaim "I AM the LIGHT of the WORLD". He did not come simply to be a moral guide by whose example men could endeavour to live, nor did he come to merely show men how they should live. He came to manifest the all-holiness and goodness of God so that men could discover and know just how sinful they really are. He showed that men need more than just an example. As the light of the world he showed that what men need is salvation.

If Jesus was merely setting an example for men to follow he would have said "My life is a light to the world" but he said "I AM the light of the world" - he reveals God as he is in whom there is no darkness, and in so doing reveals to them just how wretched their condition is when seen in that light. He did not say "whoever follows my example" or "my life" or "my way", no; he said "whoever follows ME" will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life, the light which is indeed that of God who is light.

The deity of Christ is clear in this incident. He proclaims "I AM", declares himself to be the light, and calls men to follow him. So he indeed is the very manifestation and revelation of the invisible God.

"He who has seen me has seen the Father". (John 14.9).

(iii). "I AM the Door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture". (John 10.9) .

This verse must be read and compared with verse 7 preceding it: "I AM the door of the sheep". I do not propose to go into lengthy expositions to show what the whole of this allegory reveals and means because my purpose is to show as before why the subject is introduced with "I AM".

Of course an explanation must be given of the allegory because we cannot understand the impact of the introduction "I AM" without it. I will merely explain without giving lengthy reasons what it means. An exegetical commentary on this chapter forces comparisons and lengthy investigations as the allegories are complex and not easy to understand, but I am concerned here primarily with the two words "ego eimi" by which Jesus introduces himself as the door of the sheep and just simply as the door.

In v.7 Jesus shows himself as the way out for his followers, his sheep, into the little flock who belong to the True Shepherd. The "sheepfold" of v.1 is undoubtedly Judaism. The Shepherd of the true sheep enters by the door (not to be confused with the claim of Jesus to be "the door" - the "door" in verse 1 is the way opened through the host of passages in the Old Testament which foretell and reveal the True Shepherd. Jesus Christ perfectly fitted every one of those predictions and so entered by the door through which the True Shepherd would be recognised).

"He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10.3).

Here is the import of the allegory. The only way out of the sheepfold (Judaism) for the true sheep (those Jews who believe in Jesus Christ) into the true flock (the body of true Christians) is through Jesus Christ alone. The same applies to non-Jews. "If any one enter" by the door, Jesus Christ, he will be saved.

A small illustration will make this clear. One room may have three doors. All will take a person out of the room but only one leads outside into the open. So there may be many who proclaim to know the way (as the "hirelings", the Pharisees, etc. were doing and as so many religions, e.g. Hinduism, Catholicism, Islam, etc. do in our day). But their doors merely lead into another part of the same house. But for sheep to go and find pasture they must leave the sheepfold. Likewise for men to find eternal life they must go out of the bounds of religion and find the door that leads to eternal life. Jesus said "I AM the door". By him alone men can be saved.

We must now enquire why Jesus declares his deity, "I AM the door". Only God can give life to the world but in John 6 Jesus claimed this power, declaring "I AM the bread of life". Only God is light but in John 8 Jesus declared "I AM the light of the world". In some way, therefore, God himself must be the way to eternal life as opposed to religious performances and works or mystical discoveries. This is made clear in two ways:

1. By contrast. The religious Jews, the Pharisees, were trying to establish their own righteousness. They thought they could gain access to the kingdom on their own merits. Today the Muslims regard heaven as a paradise on a higher plane than earth. By their religious observances they seek to enter this plane. It is almost like comparing a student who by his merit of qualification at school enters university. A matriculation certificate is the door to university. So religious men consider that a sufficient measure of religious self-established righteousness paves their way to heaven. But we err if we believe heaven to be like this.

Heaven presupposes the very real and personal presence of God. It is no "higher plane", it is the very realm of God's glory and personal presence. To be able to go there, men first need the very real and personal presence of God within them. If Jesus was only human, he could never be the door. Therefore he says "I AM the door". Here in human flesh was the very real manifestation of deity. Indeed he has the keys of heaven, having within himself the very fulness of the one who dwells there. The door to the very kingdom, presence and glory of God is no less than the one who says "I AM the door".

2. By comparison. I am thinking simply of what follows where Jesus claims to be the Good (or True) Shepherd. Again he says "I AM". If the shepherd of the sheep must be God himself (see below), then so must the door. As the nature of the True Shepherd of the sheep is so different from mere hirelings as that between God and men, so also must the way into the true flock be as different as that between God himself and the self-established way of ordinary men. So Jesus declares "I AM the door". If he cannot declare "I AM", he cannot be the door and this declaration of deity is essential to his claim.

(iv). "I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep". (John 10.11).

"I AM the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me". (John 10.14).

Twice Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd. The reason is that he fulfils a dual function. As the Shepherd he knows his own sheep and his own sheep know him. But as the Shepherd he also lays down his life for the sheep. As before I propose merely to look briefly at the meaning of the expression "Good Shepherd" and will then show why Jesus must be indwelt by the fulness of God to fill this office.

The adjective is stressed in this declaration and literally reads "I AM the Shepherd, the Good one". There is an accent on the nature of the shepherd. He is very fine, excellent. As with the door, Jesus draws a comparison with his circumstances. "All who came before me are thieves and robbers" (v.8). The present tense "are" indicates that he is referring not to false professors long dead but to those who were contemporary with him. This cannot be a reference to the many pseudo-Messiahs as the context (John 9 ff.) demands that we accept that he is referring to the Pharisees. Let us see how Jesus describes his office as the Good Shepherd and we will need no further study on the adjective he uses:

v.3

"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out".

v.4

"When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice"

v.10

"I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly."

v.11

"I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

v.27

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; (v.28) and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand."

The excellence of this Shepherd needs no further proof. Now we must again enquire why he says "I AM the Good Shepherd"? was not Moses also an excellent shepherd of the Israelites? And David? Could not God merely have raised up another prophet to shepherd his people? This question has been answered in part under the discussion about the title "the Door" above. Consider that, with the whole human race in a fallen state, no one could set the standard perfectly or be man's perfect guide or example but the Lord God himself.

It had long been prophesied that God would personally shepherd his own sheep:

"I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice." (Ezekiel 34.15-16).

This passage alone makes it imperative that the title Jesus was now applying to himself should be accompanied by very deity in the One making the claim. Jesus therefore declares "I AM the Good Shepherd", thereby fulfilling the prophecy above that God himself was to become the shepherd of his sheep. As I said about the "Door", so again I must say about the "Shepherd". If Jesus was not indwelt by the fulness of deity, he could not say "I AM" and simultaneously could not claim to be the Good Shepherd. When the Shepherd came, to use an expression, one essential qualification would be that he must be very deity himself.

God is also spoken of in Genesis 49.24 as a shepherd and indeed as "the" shepherd, the Rock of Israel; and in Psalm 23.1 David says "The Lord is my Shepherd."

For Jesus to claim to be the Good Shepherd would be rank blasphemy were he not the one so described, the one who said to Moses "I AM WHO I AM". Once again the emphatic "ego eimi" qualifies the title claimed and authenticates the worthiness of the one who makes the claim. Other Old Testament references to God as the Shepherd of Israel are Isaiah 40 and Psalm 80.1.

(v). "I AM the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die". (John 11.25).

We shall reverse the order of the study now. Let us first consider that which is absolute in the declaration made by Jesus ("I AM the Resurrection and the Life") before briefly glancing at the words "Resurrection" and "Life".

Firstly consider the answer Jesus gave to Martha's first remark that God would give him whatever he asked "Your brother will rise again". Martha promptly took this as a reference to the general resurrection at the end of

the world. To her, God was going to raise the dead one day by his own power but she did not consider the power Jesus had in himself to perform such an act right then. He therefore confronted her immediately with this profound assertion. She said in effect "I know there will be a resurrection and life thereafter".

Jesus soundly asserted that both these realities vested entirely in him. "I AM the Resurrection and the Life". All the power that ever existed to raise her brother from the dead was embodied in the one speaking to her. It was a challenge to faith in Martha that Jesus could raise her brother right there and then. In short, the challenge is this: "Who do you suppose me to be - just a man of flesh and blood entirely dependent on God and humbly submitting to his declared purpose of raising the dead on Judgment Day, a decree I as just a man dare not interfere with, or do you consider that I am in fact the author of all resurrection and all life, whether bodily or spiritual, indeed having absolute power and authority over life and death itself and indeed being the source of all life?"

Her reply clearly indicated that she fully accepted that, as deity, he could genuinely make such claims. By a revelation from the Father Peter confessed the truth about Jesus Christ. By a similar revelation Martha made the same confession: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God".

Need any more be said about the introduction "I AM"? God alone can be the author of life and resurrection from the dead. For Jesus to be able to truly make such claims for himself, he must also be able to truly say "I AM". If he was mere man, his claims would be indeed blasphemous. Consistently he made such claims and it is no wonder the Jews were continuously accusing him of blasphemy (Mark 14.64, John 10.33). They knew full well who he was declaring himself to be!

"Resurrection" and "Life" are defined by the words which follow. "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live". This amplifies his proclamation of himself as the Resurrection. As he said elsewhere, "I came that they may have life". (John 10.10).

To sinners dead towards God, slain by iniquities, Jesus, as the source of life in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, came to bring life. Even though the body will die, the soul of the true believer in Jesus Christ, already resurrected through regeneration, will be reclothed and the true Christian will come back alive.

"Whoever lives and believes in me will never die" explains "the Life". This life can never be quenched. The true believer has this life in himself now, vested in him as an assurance of the ultimate reality of its eternity. Jesus said "If any one keeps my word, he will never see death" (John 8.51).

The word "life" as amplified here not only means that the believer cannot be affected by death itself, but also refers to the second death on Judgment Day which has no power over him who shares in the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20.6), the regeneration of the soul. Jesus himself constitutes the true believer's hope of being raised from the dead and thereafter being in a state which will be continually sustained by him as the source of life. The assurance of this life is given to the true believer through the Holy Spirit which he received when he first believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

(vi). "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father but by me". (John 14.6).

The second part of this verse accentuates the three titles. The statement of Jesus that he is the Way came as an answer to the question of Thomas "How can we know the way?" (v.5). This simply meant, "How can we come to God?" Thomas asked the ultimate question that has perplexed and confused men ever since Adam sinned. Adam knew the Way for he had had spiritual communion with God. He knew the Truth, having knowledge of God. He had life. When he sinned he lost the way. Hiding himself in a garden was proof of this. By making aprons from figleaves he showed he had lost perception of truth. Being cast from God's presence was death as God had warned.

Now Buddha, the master of the Buddhists, showed his followers a way. Muhammed claimed unswerving allegiance to his religion of Islam as the way. But Jesus claimed that the way to God is not through a discovery (e.g., Buddha), his example (viz. Muhammed), or his teachings (all the rest), but by HIM, his very person.

Verse 7 tells us why: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. Henceforth you know him and have seen him." It is this very manifestation of the Father in himself that makes Jesus the only way to God. And it is for this reason that he says "I AM the way." As Jesus himself said:

"No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matthew 11.27).

It is this reality that establishes Jesus as the way. It is God, in his fulness, who is revealed in him and so he declares his deity "I AM the way." Any concept of God or philosophy or theology about him that does not find its completeness in Jesus Christ is false. So he says "I AM the Truth." Buddhists say that truth can be found through their eight-spoked wheel of righteousness. By strictly following eight principles they claim that they can discover truth. The Muslims believe that truth is found in a book, the Qur'an. Hindus tell us that truth is abstract. But Jesus says "I AM the Truth." It was said earlier in John's Gospel that "God is true" (John 3.33). Indeed apart from God there is no truth and all truth vests directly in him. In Jesus Christ the truth is gloriously revealed. He does not claim to be the Truth apart from or equal to God, but with the divine logos declares "I AM the Truth." To know him is to discover the very truth of God.

For "I AM the life" see on John 11.25 above.

(vii). "I AM the True Vine, and my Father is the vinedresser." (John 15.1).

"I AM the Vine, you are the branches." (John 15.5)

This is the last of the great statements of Jesus in which he declares his deity, beginning "I AM".

In verse 1 we find the adjective "true", also used in John 1.9 to describe Jesus ("the true light") and in John 6.32 ("the true bread"), all of which give substance to the declaration "I AM the Truth."

Jesus says "I AM the Vine." A short explanation of the word used will show once again why it is necessary that Jesus should introduce the phrase with another declaration of deity "I AM".

No branch can survive by itself, it must draw its life from the vine. As soon as it is cut off it cannot bear fruit. Indeed it perishes (John 15.6). Without drawing all its sustenance from the vine, real life in the branch perishes. As we have seen, without drawing real, spiritual, eternal life from Jesus we merely exist and in our sinful state are dead towards God and on judgment day will perish forever in the second death and it is therefore clear that we need real life within us. That Jesus came to bring this life to sinners is continually emphasised in this Gospel (1.4, 5.40, 6.33, 10.10). But why does he declare "I AM the Vine"? Why must he declare his deity in claiming to be the source of real human life? Because this life is the very life which comes from God and unites men to God.

Though a man may be physically alive, he is not necessarily spiritually alive. This life comes only by the very Spirit of God who makes men inwardly alive to God. Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Spirit of God to them as the prophets of old had predicted (see John 16.7, Luke 24.49). Through the prophets God had promised "I will put my Spirit within you" (Ez. 36.27, Isaiah 44.3, Joel 2.29).

As just a man Jesus could be the recipient of the Holy Spirit but only God could impart it. But Jesus said that he himself would send the Spirit, that to know him is to know the Father, that to love him is to be known of God. Who is this man, this mediator, who claims such power and authority to draw men to the very knowledge of all the fulness of God? Who is he who claims that to know him and to believe in him will gain the believer access to God? Some mere man making phenomenal claims? A prophet? A messenger? "I AM the Vine" he declares.

Our vine is the source and author of all life, the one who imparts it, the one who sustains it, and the one in whom it vests. It is he who says "I AM the Vine."

For those of us who are saved by his grace, as true Christians, may the "genuineness of our faith ... rebound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1.7). For Muslims who read this, may God

grant you the knowledge of his Son, he who says "I and the Father are One" (John 10.30), the great "I AM", whom to know is eternal life.

3. Jesus deity veiled in the tense of a sentence.

Occasionally the deity of Jesus is revealed in a sentence by his use of the present tense, "I am". In none of these is the expression emphatic (that is, the word "eimi", which means "I am", is not accompanied by the pronoun "ego" which makes the expression emphatic, e.g. "I myself am", declaring that what he claims is unique and can only be applied to himself).

The fascinating feature of these expressions is that Jesus does not intend to declare his deity but, because he is very deity, unbound by time and indeed the ruler of it, who is not measured by past or future but is the "same, yesterday, today and forever" (Hebrews 13.8), he cannot use any other expression but "I am"!

I intend just to list these utterances with very brief comments about outstanding features. The verses are translated literally.

i). "Jesus said to them, 'You know me and you know whence I am? I have not come on my own accord but he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, because from him I am' and he sent me'." (John 7.28-29).

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever and eternally lives in the present. He does not say "From him I came" but "From him I am". He is always, everywhere, eternally one with his Father whom the Jews called their God. He is from him but has never left him.

ii). "Alone I am not, but with he who sent me." (John 8.16).

The same comments apply.

"You are from below, I am from above." (John 8.23).

Again his deity is clearly revealed: "I am from above." He does not say "I came from above", Oh no, he is eternally above. Though he came to earth, yet as he is deity, he is always above. "He who comes FROM above IS above all." (John 3.31).

iv). "I am the Son of God." (John 10.36).

No emphatic "ego" is used here and the context makes the reason clear. Jesus is not asserting his deity but is defending his claim in the light of the scripture which supports the concept that men may be sons of God. However, the deity of Jesus not denied. He is merely endorsing his claim.

v). You call me Teacher and Lord. and you are right, for so I am." (John 13.13).

Once again the present tense of the verse veils the declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. He does not assert it here but nevertheless his very nature and the claim he makes demands the use of the great words denoting an ever present state, "I am".

vi). "Little children, yet a little while I am with you." (John 13.33).

In a very real sense Jesus would no longer be with them. But in an eternal sense he would never leave them, and so the scripture records, "Lo, all the days until the completion of the age, with you I AM" (Matt. 28.20).

When he said "yet a little while I am with you" he did not declare the divine Word, "EGO EIMI" - "I AM" for he spoke only of himself as their human companion. In that sense he was leaving them. He was soon to ascend to heaven. But when said "I AM with you always" he used the declaration of deity because he could never be any where else but with them. He fills all eternity. He is everywhere. In that sense he would never leave them. Humanly speaking he was leaving them but as deity in his eternal Spirit he would never leave them.

vii).

"I am no more in the world." (John 17.11).

"I am not of the world." (John 17.16).

Because of his very deity, Jesus is neither of the world, nor just a man in the world. His deity is revealed in the very content of his statements but as he is praying to the Father and not declaring himself to men, no emphatic claim is made.

viii). "You say that I am a king." (John 18.37).

Jesus is the King of Israel, which is the same as saying the Shepherd of Israel. As we have already seen that he declared his deity when proclaiming himself Israel's Shepherd (as indeed he had to, because the title belonged to God), we might expect the same here. But Pilate's question is just "Are you a king?" The Governor was thinking solely in human terms and Jesus answered him on this basis. (Contrast his answer to the High Priest in Luke 22.70 dealt with below).

There are instances in John's Gospel where Jesus uses the emphatic I AM where, unlike the absolute declarations which are all devoid of predicates and the great sayings wherein he declared his functions, each again is veiled in the tense. However, by using the emphatic form of the "I AM" it is obvious that Jesus intended that his hearers should recognise his claim.

i).

"Where I AM, you cannot come." (John 7.34).

"I desire that they may be with me where I AM." (John 17.24).

Although the emphatic "ego eimi" is used, and cannot but otherwise describe where Jesus "is", the words are simply part of the sentence and fit into the tense. In the first verse, he says the Jews cannot come "where I AM", not where he is going! And when he said the second sentence he was not desiring that his disciples should be in the garden with him but rather in his eternal realm of which he speaks on both occasions. That realm is heaven. Though he was now on earth, because he is very deity, he ever fills the whole creation, and so he speaks of his eternal realm as "where I AM."

ii). "I AM bearing witness to myself." (John 8.18).

Instead of saying "I bear witness" he emphatically declares "I AM bearing witness." As he adds that "the Father also bears witness to me" it is obvious why he speaks of his deity. According to Jewish law any claim must be established by at least two witnesses. Well, two persons in the Godhead bear witness to him - what more do the Jews need to satisfy them of his deity?

There is another reason. The very first and last words of this discourse are "I AM". The absolute declaration occurs twice more in the discourse without any predicates. Five times Jesus declares his deity. Once he states "I AM the Light of the World" and then uses the absolute "I AM" three times and again uses it in this verse. If ever Jesus set out to declare himself and his deity to men, it was during this discourse.

The construction here is unique - it is the only time Jesus began a sentence with "I AM" not followed by a predicate noun interchangeable with himself as subject.

Other uses of the emphatic "I AM" in this sense (in the flow of a sentence) are in John 14.3 - "Where I AM, you may be also", and in John 12.26 - "Where I AM, there will my servant be also."

"I AM" elsewhere in the New Testament.

John's Gospel contains most of the declarations of deity "I AM" but there are a number of other similar proclamations by Jesus elsewhere in the New Testament and we shall briefly look at some of them.

Earlier I mentioned Luke 22.70 in contrast with John 18.37. Let us read it:

"And they all said 'Are you the Son of God, then?' And he said to them, 'You say that I AM'."

Even more emphasis is given in the answer which Jesus gave to the High Priest:

"'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And he said to them, 'I AM'." (Mark 14.61-62).

This absolute declaration was the only answer Jesus could give. When asking him if he were the Son of God, the High Priest was enquiring whether he was deity manifested in the flesh. As High Priest he put Jesus on oath to answer him. Emphatically Jesus replied "I AM". At this the High Priest tore his mantle, exclaiming to those who were around him "You have heard his blasphemy". He had clearly enquired of Jesus whether he was the very image of the invisible God. Not only did Jesus reply in the affirmative, he emphatically took the divine name "I AM". Caiaphas accused him of blasphemy. The incident can only be considered in two ways. Either Jesus is the Son of God or he was speaking blasphemy. All thoughts or theories about Jesus being a good man, or just a prophet, or an example of good living must be disregarded. Either you acknowledge by his own claims of deity that he is the very Son of God or you must join forces with Caiaphas and declare him a blasphemer and an impostor. By his own claims you cannot choose any path other than one of the two. For Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

The contrast with the answer of Jesus to Pilate is worth noting. Pilate asked whether he was a king in the mould of other earthly kings and rulers. He got an answer in human terms. Caiaphas and the others enquired whether he was the divine ruler of Israel. They got a divine answer!

Other great "I AM" declarations are found in Acts 26.15 where Jesus appeared to Paul and in revealing his identity as the Holy One of Israel, he began by saying "I AM Jesus", thereby attributing to himself the office of the Holy One of God who was mentioned in Isaiah 43, a chapter where God identifies himself as the Holy One and on numerous occasions declares himself by the great word "I AM" (v.3, 11, 13, 15, 25). Jesus declared his unity and identity with the one who spoke to Isaiah by first addressing Paul with the divine word "I AM". Another incident is recorded in Luke 24.39 where Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection and proclaimed himself as he gave them proofs of his identity by "I AM" (to which Thomas responded 'My Lord and my God!' - John 20.28). But some of the greatest declarations are in the book of Revelation where Jesus speaks from the throne of God. We shall look briefly at just a few of these.

i). "I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE BEGINNING AND THE END." (Revelation 22.13. Compare with 1.8, 1.17, 21.6).

Of all the claims Jesus ever made to deity, this is surely the greatest and embraces all that ever has been, ever is, or ever will be. Further comment is unnecessary.

ii). "All the churches shall know that I AM, the one who searches mind and heart." (Revelation 2.23).

This is a clear statement that the whole body of true Christian believers shall know that he in whom they trust, who was crucified, is indeed their Lord.

iii). "I AM the Root and the offspring of David; the Bright Morning Star." (Revelation 22.16).

This is the last great I AM in the Bible. Not only is Jesus descended from David, he is also his root. He is the Son of David, he is also his Lord. (Compare the question of Jesus given in Matthew 22.41-45). He is also the Bright Morning Star - a symbol of royalty of which our divine sovereign is altogether worthy.

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OUR APPROACH TO ISLAM:

CHARITY OR MILITANCY?

by

JOHN GILCHRIST

"Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"

Luke 22:49

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OUR APPROACH TO ISLAM

1. THE PROVOCATION: ISLAM'S INHERENT MILITANCY.

The decade of the Nineteen-Eighties will be remembered for the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and its effects on both the Muslim world and the traditionally Christian West. The Islamic Revolution in Iran, spearheaded by the Ayatollah Khomeini, gave a renewed impetus to a basic Islamic concept which, with some exceptions, had been dormant for many centuries. In 1979 Khomeini succeeded in overthrowing the Shah and proclaimed Iran an Islamic state. Since then the world has become acutely aware of the revival of Islam's concept of *Jihad* known to most people today simply as "holy war". It derives from the Arabic word *jahada* which principally means "to struggle" but which has generally been interpreted by Muslim scholars in history to mean actual fighting and warfare for the faith of Islam. This did not mean the forced conversion of unbelievers at the point of the sword (as has sometimes been supposed) but the defence of Islam or its expansion as occasion required.

The well-known scholar Muhammad ibn Rushd (known to European history as Averroes), an Islamic philosopher based at Sevilla and Cordoba in Muslim Spain in the twelfth century AD, in his major legal handbook known as *Bidayat al- Mujtahid*, dealt with Jihad purely as active warfare on behalf of Islam and set out the conditions under which it should be waged, the extent of the damage that could be inflicted on different enemies, and the circumstances in which a truce could be negotiated.

He, like the majority of Muslim scholars of his time, considered Jihad to be a compulsory obligation in terms of the Qur'anic injunction "Fighting is prescribed for you, though it is distasteful to you" (Surah 2.216). Other Qur'anic texts quoted by him in support of the principle that Jihad meant actual warfare are:

When you meet the disbelievers, smite their necks till you have fully subdued them. *Surah 47.4*

When the sacred months are past, slay the polytheists (*al-mushrikin* - "the associaters") wherever you find them. *Surah 9.5*

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress proper limits, verily Allah does not love such transgressors. *Surah 2.190*

During the colonial era up to eighty-five percent of the Muslim world came under European rule. For two centuries, despite occasional attempts at liberation, the yoke of foreign domination lay upon *dar al-Islam* (the established Muslim world). At this time many Muslim scholars began to reconsider the concept of Jihad. One of the most prominent of these was Mahmud Shaltut who rose to the top post of *Shaykh al-Azhar*, the head of Islam's oldest university at Cairo in Egypt. He wrote a famous book titled *Al-Qur'an wa-al-Qitaal* ("The Qur'an and Fighting") which was published in 1948. He taught that actual warfare was only permissible in defence of Islam where the opposition had first been guilty of oppression, rebellion or aggression. The mission of Islam, however, had to be prosecuted by peaceful means only. Thus warfare was allowed solely for defensive purposes and not to expand Islam as had previously been taught. Many Muslim scholars hold this view today. Other scholars went so far as to teach that Jihad was purely a spiritual struggle, in particular a Muslim's wrestling against the evil tendencies of his own human soul.

Since 1980, however, Jihad has taken on a new dimension. This time it has been applied to specific acts of violence calculated to terrorise the perceived enemies of Islam into submission and retreat. Usually the aim has been to hit conspicuous targets for maximum effect. The suicide missions directed against the American Embassy in Beirut (September 1983) and the American and French military compounds in the city (23rd October 1983) cost over three hundred lives. Numerous hijackings of international aircraft by members of Islamic movements hit the headlines. American servicemen in these planes were, on occasion, shot and dumped on the tarmac below the aircraft. An Italian luxury liner, the *Achille Lauro*, was hijacked by Palestinian commandos in October 1985. Two months later other Palestinian groups led by Abu Nidal attacked queues at El Al check-in points at Vienna and Rome, killing eighteen and wounding more than a hundred. The hostage crisis in Iran, when American Embassy officials were detained for more than a year, remains perhaps the most obvious example of modern Islamic militancy.

These have not been the activities of fundamentalist extremists only, they have been sanctioned by leaders such as Gaddafi and Khomeini. The latter once described the Pope as the "leader of a false religion" while the former said of him "This man does not recognise Muhammad as the final messenger of Allah; he is therefore an enemy of Islam" (quoted in Laffin, *Holy War: Islam Fights*, p.93). In May 1981 a Turkish Muslim, Mehmet Ali Agca, attempted to assassinate the Pope, shooting him and wounding him seriously in the process.

The modern spirit of Jihad was anticipated in a book written by Brigadier S.K. Malik and published in Pakistan in 1979, titled *The Quranic Concept of War*. General Zia ul-Haq in a foreword to this book said it brought out with "simplicity, clarity and precision" the Qur'anic philosophy of Jihad, adding that it prescribed "the ONLY pattern of war" that a Muslim country could wage (the emphasis is Zia's). Malik takes the following text as a licence for terrorism against the perceived enemies of Islam:

I will instil terror into the hearts of the unbelievers: Smite ye above their necks and smite all their fingertips off them. (*Surah 8.12* - Yusuf Ali's exact rendering).

The author, commenting on this text, gives the following impression of Islamic Jihad - an impression boldly stated by the late President of Pakistan to be the "only" way jihad can be prosecuted:

Terror struck into the hearts of the enemies is not only a means, it is the end in itself. Once a condition of terror into the opponent's heart is obtained, hardly anything is left to be achieved. It is the point where the means and the end meet and merge. Terror is not a means of imposing decision upon the enemy; it is

the decision we wish to impose upon him. (Malik, The Quranic Concept of War, p.59).

Malik concludes that such terrorism is to aim not only at the enemy's retreat but to destroy him completely. "It can be instilled only if the opponent's faith is destroyed ... To instil terror into the hearts of the enemy, it is essential, in the ultimate analysis, to dislocate his Faith" (p.60).

That many Muslims have traditionally believed that Islam has an inherent militancy based on Qur'anic injunctions cannot be denied. Islamic Jihad is as active today as it ever was, Just recently, right here in South Africa, a movement known as the Jihad Movement of South Africa was formed by Maulana Abdul Hadi al-Qaderi. In a report in the Sunday Tribune on the 5th August 1990 he stated "We don't condone senseless killings, but if any Muslim takes it upon himself to defend Islam then he has a personal right to do so". The movement warned that anyone insulting any prophet of Islam would be "confronted physically" and that it "could not guarantee the safety of anyone attacking the beliefs of the Muslims".

In South Africa, over many years, Christians have been subjected to the distribution of many booklets insulting their own faith, such as *Is the Bible God's Word?*, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?* and *The God that Never Was*, all published by the Islamic Propagation Centre International. In the booklet on the crucifixion written by Ahmed Deedat the author directly attacks the personality of Jesus Christ on numerous occasions, referring to what he calls "the hot and cold blowings of Jesus" adding "Now he must pay the price of failure", saying elsewhere that "Jesus had doubly miscalculated", and concluding:

It can be claimed with justification that Jesus Christ (pbuh) was the "Most unfortunate of all God's messengers". (Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, p.23).

In May 1985, during a speech in Kigali, capital of Rwanda, Colonel Gaddafi of Libya also severely provoked the Christian Church, saying that it is "false, infidel and irreligious". He claimed that Christians "are intruders in Africa" and described Christianity as "the religion of the Jews". Calling for the assassination of President Mobutu of Zaire as an exercise of jihad, he said "He who kills this man will go to Paradise". This speech was broadcast in Arabic the same day from Tripoli over "The Voice of the Greater Arab Homeland" (Laffin, *Holy War: Islam Fights*, p.135).

Islam can be a very militant faith and will resort to violence to defend itself or promote its objectives at times as the evidences we have given plainly show. While one Muslim leader in Durban threatens anyone who insults Islam with physical violence, another in the same city distributes hundreds of thousands of booklets reviling the founder of the Christian faith. What is to be the Christian response to such provocation? Shall we too form movements with the object of violently assaulting those who "insult" our faith? Is there room for a Christian form of jihad? Can Christianity be effectively served by acts of violence calculated to strike terror into the hearts of its opponents until their whole faith is shattered (this being Brigadier Malik's recipe for the objects of Islamic jihad)? Or is there not an alternative approach - and a much better way?

Let us proceed to examine what the proper Christian approach and response to Islam should be in the light of basic Biblical principles.

2. THE CHRISTIAN ALTERNATIVE: TOLERANCE AND RESPECT.

"And I will show you a still more excellent way ... Love is patient and kind". *1 Corinthians 13.1,4.*

The Jihad option was perhaps the Church's first real response to Islam. After the initial expansion of Islam during the first hundred and fifty years after Muhammad's death, when Muslim armies marched across North Africa and into Spain, conquering most of the Middle East and parts of Europe and Asia, the traditional world of Christendom set about evicting the invaders. Early victories over Muslim units in parts of Europe were regarded purely as defensive measures to recover lost ground. Augustine had, many centuries earlier, formulated a doctrine of "just war" in Christian terms, restricting participation to conflict for justifiable causes and fought with noble intentions only. During the papacies of Leo IV and John VIII respectively in the latter part of the 9th century AD, however, a Christian equivalent to Jihad was launched - the Crusades. A variety of heavenly benefits for those who fought and died in battle against infidels (similar to the concept of *shaheed* in Islam by which all Muslim casualties in battle are regarded as "martyrs") was promised to all who took a sword for

Christianity in one hand and a shield with the cross embossed on it in the other. The Church, quite simply, took over the whole concept of Jihad and returned eye for eye.

One Crusade followed another. The first charges produced striking successes, the later ones ended in disaster. For centuries, however, Christians and Muslims generally only met on the battlefield. The decline of Islamic power after the great eras of the Ottoman, Mughal and Safavid Empires of the sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, however, gave the European powers their first real opportunity to conquer lands that had been controlled by the Muslims since the early days of Islam. The Industrial Revolution gave these powers the means to overrun most of the Muslim world and during the nineteenth century up to 85% of *dar al-Islam* came under Western (and therefore nominal Christian) control.

The Church at this time adopted its second approach to Islam. With the threat of Muslim invasion now entirely removed, a spirit of apathy set in. There was no longer a need for active militancy and the Church felt it could now afford to generally ignore the Muslim world. Even though this period saw the development of a growing international mission of evangelism towards the Muslim world the general attitude was one of disinterest. For two hundred years Islam was generally overlooked - if it could not be fully evangelised, at least it had been subdued, and little further attention to it was needed. The revolution in Iran coupled with all that has taken place in the last ten years, however, has shaken the Christian world out of its complacency. Islamic militancy has revived strongly and is menacing the West.

Not surprisingly there have been calls for a renewed spirit of the Crusades - a militant struggle to again protect the Christian world from aggressive Muslim ventures. Today, however, Church and State are not as intertwined as they were in medieval times and so the call within the Church has been for a verbal and spiritual struggle against the rising Islamic challenge. A minister of the Evangeliese Gereformeerde Kerk in the Cape, Ds. Soon Zevenster, has called boldly for a "teenaksie" (a counter-struggle) and other evangelical Christian leaders, both in South Africa and elsewhere in the traditional Christian world, have come out strongly in favour of a militant response. "We are at war with Islam", they cry, and a mighty spiritual warfare has been called for against the forces and powers of Islam.

The militant approach goes hand in hand with traditional Christian fundamentalism. The evangelical fundamentalist sees himself as a soldier of the cross - it is his duty to fight battles for God, to resist and cast out demons for God, and to scatter the enemies of God. The spirit of militancy that once sparked the military Crusades of history today manifests itself in evangelical spiritual warfare. Is there not possibly a third approach as an alternative to the militant and apathetic approaches we have considered? The "still more excellent way" that Paul proposed?

Christianity, as established by its founder and perfect example Jesus Christ, is first and foremost a religion of charity and compassion. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13.35). No one can avoid the implications of this principle - if Christians are graciously prepared to accept that Muslims are their neighbours, then the call from the Saviour is "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 23.39); if, however, they remain persuaded that Muslims are their enemies, even then the Saviour's call remains unchanged - "Love your enemies" (Luke 6.27). A leading Christian minister, when asked recently what the right approach to the Muslims should be, responded in just two words - "Love 'em!"

In the last two centuries many efforts have been made to reach Muslims for Christ throughout the world and, beginning with Henry Martyn at the beginning of the last century, a growing evangelical ministry has reached out to the Muslim world. Too often, unfortunately, the Gospel witness has had a militant character, one which has been accentuated since the resurgence of Islamic jihad. If our call is to win Muslims for Christ rather than defeat the forces of Islam, surely the time has come for a purely charitable approach. An illustration will help here. The sun and the wind were said to have had argument one day. The wind mocked the sun for its inability to move around as and where it wished. The sun responded by pointing out a man who was dressed in a suit walking down a road and called on the wind, if it was so powerful, to get the jacket off the man. The more the wind blew on him, however the more tightly the man pulled the jacket around himself. When the sun poured its warm rays upon the man, however, the man began to sweat and removed the jacket himself. I have no doubt that

Muslims likewise will respond more readily to the warm rays of Christian love and compassion than the cold blasts of militancy.

The vast majority of Muslims worldwide instinctively know that militancy is wrong. Not even the ayatollahs and mullahs of Iran were able to inspire the Iranian people with the spirit of Jihad to the extent that they wanted to - at the end of the war, although the population of Iran is three times that of Iraq, Hussein was still able to put more men into the field of battle than Khomeini. Most human beings of whatever persuasion are moderate in their approach to life. Common sense tells most people that when we kill each other, we destroy ourselves as well. We all breathe the same air, we all live in one world, and one God continues to extend his providential grace to all nations alike. The vast majority of Muslim people are schooled in hospitality, tolerance and the ethics and morals of Islam. There is no need for a militant approach towards such a people when the majority of them will warmly respond to love, kindness and compassion.

Paul spoke of a "still more excellent way". Let us see how he applied the principle of charity in his own approach to followers of other faiths. We have a fine example in the occasion when he was taken by Epicurean and Stoic philosophers to the summit of the Areopagus in Athens and was given an opportunity to address them. Athens was a major centre of pagan idolatry and when Paul arrived there "his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols" (Acts 17.16). Nevertheless when he began to speak he said:

"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along, and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an object with this inscription, 'To an unknown god'. What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you". *Acts 17.22-23.*

He could have allowed the provocation in his spirit to overcome him and so reviled their excesses, but he was careful to show as much respect as he could to the Athenians and foreigners who lived there. Instead of saying they were "very religious" he could have accused them of being *grossly idolatrous* and instead of speaking neutrally of their "objects of worship" he could have described them as *detestable idols*, but he was determined to accommodate them as far as possible without compromising his own position. He was more concerned about maintaining their dignity than he was about taking a stand for his own convictions.

Four words in the text we have quoted also give us further insight into Paul's approach and they are italicised as follows: "I *perceive* that in every way you are very religious ... As I *passed* along and *observed* ... I *found* an altar". He did not turn his eyes away from what he saw in the streets of the city in pious disgust, rather he deliberately acquainted himself with the beliefs and background of the people he intended to reach with the Gospel. Not only did this exposure help him to preach more effectively to the Athenians, it was also a gesture of respect towards their heritage.

On another occasion, when Demetrius and the craftsmen of Ephesus sought to prevent Paul and his companions from drawing any more people away from the worship of their goddess Artemis to the faith of Jesus Christ, the town clerk quieted the crowd, saying "You have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess" (Acts 19.37). Once again we see that the early Christian evangelists refrained from reviling the beliefs of others and, in a spirit of true charity, were careful to respect the heritage of the people they met even though they were not in sympathy with it. Paul summed up his approach as follows:

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate. *1 Corinthians 4.12-13.*

Their attitude was derived from nothing less than the example of their own Lord and Master Jesus Christ of whom it was likewise said "When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten" (1 Peter 2.23). Even when we are confronted with a spirit of total militancy we are not justified in responding in the same way.

The Christian approach must always be charitable and compassionate. "To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also" (Luke 6.29). This does not mean that every assault on our faith must be taken lying down or that we should allow ourselves to be trampled upon but that our overall disposition must be one of selfless love and a desire to build up and not to tear down.

3. ALLAH - THE SUPREME BEING OR A "FALSE GOD"?

One of the key features of the modern spirit of Christian militancy against Islam is the proposal that Allah, the deity of Islam, is a "false god" and that he cannot in any way be identified with the true God of the Bible. This approach is vigorously pursued in many recent Christian writings on Islam notwithstanding the fact that the Qur'an unambiguously defines Allah as the same God in whom the Jews and Christians believe. At one point it plainly states that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Specifically addressing the "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab*) it says:

"We believe in what has been sent down to us and in that which was sent down to you; our God and your God is One; and we are submitted to him". *Surah 29.46*

As we shall see the basic concept of God in the Qur'an, in particular the definition of his attributes, is very similar to the general description of the nature of God in the Bible. Why, then, do Christian writers deny that there is any point of contact between the Allah of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible? It would appear that it is the very proximity of the Qur'an's concept to the basic Biblical doctrine of God that causes some Christian writers to vehemently distinguish between them. Islam is not like the other major religions of the world which all preceded Christianity and therefore do not have an inherent challenge to its claims to be God's final revelation to mankind. Islam is the only major religion to follow the Christian faith and, unlike secular philosophies such as communism and humanism or the eastern mystical religions which are generally distinct from Christianity, it challenges the Christian faith at its roots by acknowledging its basic principles while claiming that these have been distorted and that it came to correct them. The onslaught comes from within - it is by admitting the basics of the Christian faith that it is able to challenge its finer details so forcefully. It is in acknowledging the God whom we worship that it is most equipped to call the nature of that worship into question.

Many Christians, sensing the sharp edge of the challenge from within, believe that the only way to resist it is to divide Islam entirely from Christianity and to reject any suggestion of a common identity between them at any point. Thus Jesus is not the Isa of the Qur'an and our God is not the Allah set forth in that book. It appears to such Christians that the moment we accept the Qur'an's appeal to acknowledge that we both worship the same God, we simultaneously lose the uniqueness of what we believe has been ours alone by divine revelation and open the door for an Islamic charge on all we hold dear at a relative and comparative level.

Therefore every effort is made to distinguish the God of the Bible from the Allah of Islam. In his pamphlet *Halaal and the Christian* (to which we shall refer more fully shortly) Ds. Zevenster, reacting to the suggestion that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, says: "This statement must be resisted at all costs ... they cannot be worshipping the same God and therefore must be serving a false god".

The argument, found in many similar Christian writings on this subject, is based on the premise that because Muslims deny that God is Triune, that Jesus is the Son of God and that God sent his Son to die for us, they cannot claim to believe in the same God in whom we believe and Allah is therefore a "false god". Basilea Schlink has written a book titled *Allah or the God of the Bible - What is the Truth?* Once again the Allah of Islam is entirely distinguished from the God of the Bible and in this way the author too endeavours to divide Islam and Christianity and allow no point of agreement or common identity between them.

Once Allah is declared to be another God or, worse still, a "false god", it becomes easy to revile him and assail his character. Schlink claims:

On the one hand, Mohammed's Allah is identified with the black stone of the Kaaba. A stone is cold, soulless. This is often the nature of pagan gods: they are rigid and lifeless. (Schlink, *Allah or the God of the Bible?*, p.15)

It is entirely wrong to identify Allah with the black stone in the Ka'aba as though this were an idolatrous representation of the Islamic deity. The black stone in Islam is believed to be an object which Allah sent down as the cornerstone of the Ka'aba which, Islamic tradition suggests, was originally crystal clear but became pitch-black through taking the sins of the Muslims who kiss it. In no way can the stone be directly identified with Allah as the unseen Supreme Being of the universe. The Muslim practice of kissing a stone in imitation of the pagan Arab practice of kissing their idols which usually took the form of stones can be severely challenged on

other grounds, but it is grossly wrong, and a severe offence to Muslim sensitivities, to charge that the black stone, cold and lifeless, is identified with Allah.

Schlink goes on to say "Allah is an imperious god ... Allah resembles a great despot, an arbitrary ruler ... Mohammed's Allah has no heart, love for mankind is foreign to him" (*Allah or the God of the Bible?*, pp.16-17). The section of her book in which these statements appear is titled "Allah - a Soulless God and Dictator". These claims are, in my view, imbalanced and erroneous, but what seems to occasion them is the feeling that Islam's deity must not only be distinguished from the God of the Bible but must also be shown to be entirely different to him and a poor caricature of his true nature. Thus the author seeks to force Islam away from Christianity, thereby preserving our divine heritage and maintaining its unique distinctiveness.

So likewise Dr. J.L.Langerman, in another critique of the halaal symbol published by the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, says "The god worshipped by Islam is not the God worshipped by the followers of the Christian faith, because it does not line up the New Testament teaching" while Marius Baar charges "Allah has nothing to do with the God of the Bible. He is a poor counterfeit of God" (*The Unholy War*, p.70).

Perhaps the strongest denunciation of Allah in Islam appears in the suggestion that he is not only a "false god" and a "soulless dictator" but that he is an actual demonic spirit who revealed the Qur'an to Muhammad and thereby impersonated the one true God. This approach is clearly defined in the following summary:

The spirit who calls himself Allah and claims to have inspired Muhammed cannot be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Instead he is a *spirit full of lies*, who took upon himself the old Arabic name of God, "*Allah*", wearing it over his face like a mask and claiming to be God, although he is not God. Allah in Islam is an *unclean spirit of Satan*, who rules with great power in a religious disguise to this very day (John 8:30-48). (Abd-al-Masih, *Who is Allah in Islam?*, p.68)

One cannot help asking the following question in response to this suggestion - if the Allah of the Qur'an is really the devil himself, then who is the devil in the Qur'an? That this approach would be highly offensive to Muslims hardly needs to be proved. Yet it is typical of contemporary Christian crusading mentality.

So often the question is put to me "Is Allah the God of the Bible?" Too often people are looking for a simple "Yes" or "No" answer. Langerman, Zevenster, Schlink and Abd-al-Masih all give an emphatic "No" to this question. I do not for a minute propose with equal emphasis to say "Yes", but I am compelled to strongly reject the approach taken by these writers as I believe a more balanced and objective approach, based on a genuine concern for factual truth and not on a fear of compromise of vested Christian interests, must lead to a different conclusion. This matter is important because our ultimate approach at this point will determine whether we will respond to the Muslims charitably or not.

The Christian writers who endeavour to distinguish between the Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible invariably concentrate on what Allah is *not* - he is not the Father of Jesus Christ, he is not Triune, he has no Son, etc. Rarely is there an evaluation of who Allah in Islam really *is*. It would seem to be logical, before we express ourselves in convenient denunciations, to enquire what the Qur'an actually teaches about Allah and how he is defined in the book.

Firstly it is quite apparent from the Qur'an that the name *Allah* did not originate with Muhammad. The pagan Arabs openly acknowledged that, beyond their various deities and idols, there was one Supreme Being who was the ultimate source of all things. "If you should ask them who created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and moon, they will assuredly reply 'Allah'" (Surah 29.61). When faced with disasters "they cry unto Allah" (Surah 10.22) and they also "swear their strongest oaths by Allah" (Surah 16.38). Western scholars agree that the name has pre-Islamic origins and it is almost certainly derived from the Syriac Christian *Alaha* (Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*, p.66).

Secondly the name *Allah* is to this day not exclusive to Islam. Although Christian Arabs use the name *Yasu* for Jesus and not the Qur'anic *Isa*, they use no other name for God than *Allah*. It is not so much the name of the deity of Islam as it is simply the Arabic name for God, the one Supreme Being who created all things. What "God" is to the English language (and "theos" to Greek) is what "Allah" is to Arabic. Even the small Arabic-

speaking Jewish communities of Morocco and other North-African Muslim countries use the name *Allah* for God and every translation of the Bible into Arabic employs this name alone. If anyone was to teach a group of Arab Christians that Allah was a "false god" they would think he was blaspheming, or if this same group was taught that "Allah does not actually exist" (another recent Christian approach), they would think he was an atheist.

Thirdly, and this is perhaps the most important point, the Allah of the Qur'an is expressly said to be the same God as the one in whom the Jews and the Christians believe. He is not only said to be the Creator of the heavens and the earth, he is also clearly defined as the specific deity of the Biblical faiths. The pagan Arabs acknowledged the existence of a Supreme Being, Allah, but they would not admit that he was also *ar-Rahman*, "the Compassionate", the name specifically given to God by the Jews of that time.

When it is said to them, 'Adore ye the Compassionate', they say, 'And what is the Compassionate? Why should we adore what you command?' *Surah 25.60*

And they blaspheme at the mention of the Compassionate. *Surah 21.36*

When Muhammad stated that the Allah of his faith was the same deity whom the Jews described as *ar-Rahmaan*, the pagan Arabs reviled him. The Qur'an specifically applies the two names to the same deity: "Call upon Allah, or call upon ar-Rahmaan, by whatever name you call upon him" (*Surah 17.110*). Allah in Islam was clearly intended to be the God of the Bible. In principle there can be no objection to the identification. The Qur'an plainly states that Allah created the heavens and the earth in six days, that he created Adam and Eve as our first parents, that they were cast out of the Garden of Eden (*Jannatul-'Adn* in Islam) when they ate the forbidden fruit, that he sent prophets such as Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus to guide the nations, that he showed special favours to the children of Israel, that there will be a great Judgment Day, and that the destiny of mankind is either to heaven (*jannat*) or hell (*jahannam*). In these basic descriptions of his actions in history there can be no doubt that we are dealing with the same God.

Furthermore the Qur'an describes the attributes of Allah in various titles which it gives him, such as *ar-Rahim* (the Merciful), *al-Quddus* (the Holy), *as-Salam* (the Peaceful), *as-Samad* (the Eternal), etc. These titles are known as *al-asma al-husna* - "the beautiful names" (*Surah 59.24*) and are said to number ninety-nine in all. A Biblical equivalent for each one can be found without any difficulty.

The difference between the Biblical and Qur'anic doctrines of God comes in our respective concepts of these attributes, it is not a question of actual identity. To Christians the statement that God is the Forgiver (*al-Ghaffur*) would mean that he reconciled us to himself in Christ and forgave us our sins on account of the redeeming work done on the cross. To the Muslim the title simply means that he can (and will) forgive simply as he chooses. Neither of us deny that God is forgiving, the issue is how that forgiveness is exercised and to whom it will be applied. The same can be said for all the other titles.

The issue is not one of identity but purely one of a distinction of concepts. Sure we will deny that the fulness of God's character is revealed in Islam and will stand by our conviction that this revelation came through Jesus Christ alone. To this extent we must distance ourselves from the Allah of Islam and cannot give an unqualified "Yes" answer to the question of whether he and the God of the Bible are the same, but it is equally obvious that we also cannot give a simple "No" answer to the question. We can define our position by saying that in principle we believe in the same God but that we differ in our understanding of how he fully revealed himself.

We need to return to Paul's sermon on the Areopagus for a final assessment of this question. (All Christians intending to evangelise Muslims should read through this sermon very carefully - it is a model of a correct Christian approach in a crosscultural context). Twice in his message Paul appealed to pagan writings to support his contention that the "unknown god" whom the Athenians worshipped was the same God he was now proclaiming to them. The relevant passage reads as follows:

"Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring'. Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the Deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, a representation by the art and imagination of man". *Acts 17.27-29*.

"In *him* we live" and we are "*his* offspring", the Greek poets said, and Paul unreservedly applied these references to the God whom he was proclaiming, the God who raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 17.31). Yet they were originally *both* applied to Zeus, the supreme god of the pagan Greeks and known to the Romans as Jupiter. The first quote comes from a poem by Epiminedes the Cretan where the words were addressed to Zeus by his son and the second derives from the *Phainomena* of Aratus the Sicilian which opens with the words "Let us begin with Zeus" (cf. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, pp.359-360). It may seem remarkable that Paul should have no scruples about applying such statements to the only Supreme Being of the universe and therefore to the God whom he proclaimed, yet he did. He obviously considered that, to the extent that they correctly described something of God's own character, they could be considered as referring ultimately to him. If Paul could make such allowances, can we not accept that the Allah of Islam too is, in principle, the same as the God of the Bible, especially when we consider that the Qur'an's description of him is far closer to the character of the one true God than the attributes of Zeus and that there was a deliberate intention to refer to the same deity.

4. YAHWEH OR ALLAH - AN APPROPRIATE COMPARISON?

During a lecture given on the halaal symbol Ds. Soon Zevenster said of the Muslims "Hulle eer Allah, 'n valse god, hulle eer nie Yahweh nie" (They honour Allah, a false god, they do not honour Yahweh). It has become fashionable in some circles to again draw a distinction between the Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible by referring to his Biblical name Yahweh. So you have a choice - Yahweh or Allah? True God or false god? A brief analysis of this approach will show that here, too, the comparison is inappropriate and unacceptable.

While the name Yahweh appears throughout the Old Testament in the original Hebrew text, it appears nowhere in the books of the New Testament, not even in the original Greek texts. In Old Testament times Yahweh was the name of the covenant God of Israel (Exodus 3.15), but the Lord has never used this name in a new covenant context. The coming of Jesus Christ brought about a major change in God's relationship with his people. Now he is projected solely as the Father of all true believers, Jew and Gentile alike, without any distinction being made between them (Romans 10.12). The name Yahweh was used solely in an old covenant context and the New Testament plainly states that the old covenant has become "obsolete" (Hebrews 8.13) and that it has been entirely "abolished" (Hebrews 10.9). For this reason one never finds the name Yahweh in the New Testament - it was relevant only to the people of Israel in old covenant times.

Yet Ds. Zevenster went on to say "My Bybel sê: 'So lief het die Yahweh God die wêreld gehad'..." (My Bible says: Yahweh God so loved the world ... John 3.16). It would be interesting to see that Bible! There is no text of John 3.16 anywhere which says that "Yahweh God" so loved the world - the Greek contains only the word *theos*. On other occasions it has been suggested that the Arabic Bible should have used the word Yahweh for *theos* and not Allah. Again the suggestion must be challenged on textual grounds. The New Testament deliberately avoids the use of the name Yahweh and the only possible translation of *theos* into Arabic is Allah.

Militant Christian writers say Allah cannot be a representation of the true God because, according to the Qur'an, he is not Triune, he has no Son, etc. Well then, the Yahweh of the Jews today cannot be the true God either because they maintain that he too is not Triune and also has no Son. At least Islam acknowledges Jesus as a man sent from God but the Jews say Yahweh did not send Jesus at all!

Nonetheless those who deny that Muslims believe in the true God will never lay this charge at the feet of the Jews. They liberally accept that the God whom the Jews worship today is the true God, yet the Jews deny Jesus Christ entirely. Why, then, can we not at least concede that the Muslims offer their worship to God as well? Instead of attributing their worship to a false god, should we not rather hold that it is duly offered to the true God but is not acceptable outside of faith in Jesus Christ? (cf. Matthew 15.9 - "In *vain* do they worship *me*").

It seems to me that much of the problem here, and indeed possibly the root cause of so much of the virulent anti-Islamic militancy found in Christian writings today, stems from the premillennial view of Biblical eschatology. Central to this view is the belief that God has restored Israel as a nation and that he will send his Messiah to deliver the city of Jerusalem and save the State of Israel at the end of the age from her enemies. As the immediate enemies of Israel are obviously the Muslim nations that surround it, it is hardly surprising that premillennialists are usually the source of anti-Islamic militancy (Marius Baar's book *The Unholy War* is a prize

example) though this does not apply to all of them. This also explains why it is accepted that Jews believe in the one true God even though they deny Jesus Christ entirely, while the Allah of Islam is rejected simply because it is said he has no Son.

In our view the evangelical Church would be able to develop a far more charitable and genuinely compassionate approach to the Muslim people of the world if it could see that there will never again be a distinction between Jew and Gentile, something Paul declared again and again (cf. Romans 3.29, 1 Corinthians 12.13, Galatians 3.28, Colossians 3.11).

As we have seen the Book of Hebrews plainly states that the old covenant which God made with Israel was "obsolete ... ready to vanish away" (8.13) and that it was totally "abolished" (10.9) so that the new covenant could be introduced. The language used in these texts could not have been stronger - God will never again show favour or partiality towards Israel as a nation.

All Old Testament prophecy about the restoration of God's people (Israel at the time) must be understood in New Testament terms, therefore, to refer to the Church, just as all Old Testament prophecies about the re-establishment of Jerusalem as the city where God will dwell forever (Zechariah 2.4-12) are expressly shown in the Book of Revelation to refer to the *heavenly* Jerusalem which will be the eternal city of God and will come down from above (Revelation 21.10). Just as God has introduced a new covenant to entirely replace the old, so the New Testament speaks only of "the city of the living God" as a "*heavenly* Jerusalem" which will be the eternal city of God and will come down from above (Revelation 21.10). Just as God has introduced a new covenant to entirely replace the old, so the New Testament speaks only of "the city of the living God" as a "*heavenly* Jerusalem" (Hebrews 12.22) and elsewhere records Jesus as describing it as "the city of my God, the *new* Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven" (Revelation 3.12). The New Testament knows nothing of the restoration of the earthly Jerusalem as the city of God. If the Church could divest itself of its premillennial interpretation of Scripture it would perhaps see that God loves all the Muslims of the world, and therefore the Muslim *nations* of the world, as much as he still loves the people of Israel. We would then be able to fulfil our duty towards the Muslims by evangelising them in a spirit of genuine love and unreserved compassion.

Yahweh or Allah? True God or false god? Our Gospel is not about God's identity, it is about the revelation of his love and kindness towards us in the gift of his Son Jesus Christ. What is our message to the Muslims - "Our God is the true God while you worship a false god. You must denounce him and come and worship our God"? No, not at all. This is our message to the Muslims: God has redeemed us in Christ, in HIM you can be *forgiven* by God, you can become *children* of God, you can receive the *Spirit* of God, you can come to personally *know* God, and you can be assured of a place in the *kingdom* of God. This is the new covenant message (Jeremiah 31.31-34), this is the issue between Christianity and Islam and the essence of our Gospel.

5. REVILING ISLAM AS A RELIGION OF IDOLATRY.

It has also become fashionable in recent times in some sections of the Church to revile Islam as a religion of idolatry. This has much to do with the recent controversy surrounding the halaal symbol which we will deal with in the next section but here we shall confine ourselves to the subject itself. In a pamphlet issued by B.F. Hayes on Sanlamhof titled *Die Christen en Halaal* the author says that Ds. Zevenster "het die moed van sy oortuiging gehad om 'n paar sake duidelik oop te vlek" (has had the courage of his convictions to clearly expose a few matters) and the first of these is said to be "die afgodiese karakter van die Islam" (the idolatrous character of Islam). This approach has appeared in other publications as well and it has been suggested that not only Allah but even the Qur'an and Muhammad himself are idols on the premise that anything that is not consistent with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ must be idolatrous.

It is very easy to stick labels on things. Allah is an idol, the Qur'an is an idol, Muhammad is an idol - such is the simple way we are now seeing the whole of Islam labelled and misrepresented. This of course makes it easy to write the whole religion off and cast it aside without any further study or reflection. Its whole heritage can thus be reviled and summarily dismissed without further ado.

The proponents of this view fail to discern that there is a radical difference between Islam and the animistic religions of the world. The latter are generally idolatrous and have very little in common with Christianity. Our faith has a divine heritage through Judaism based on foundations of theology, prophethood and scripture. Islam, unlike the other religions, confronts us at this very level. Allah, Muhammad and the Qur'an have come up alongside the Gospel at these very points - theology, prophethood and scripture. The Qur'an is not an idol, it is a form of scripture competing with our scripture at a remarkably intense level. Allah is not an idol - he is a representation of the true God of the Bible with certain vital characteristics of his nature and purposes for mankind in our view distorted and misrepresented. Muhammad is not an idol, nor was he an idolater. He stands and put himself at the level of prophethood over and against the very prophetic heritage that led to the advent of our Lord Jesus.

There is a further problem with simplistically labelling things as idols - we will soon be adding the sub-label "demons" as idolatry and demonism always go together (1 Corinthians 10.19-20). Thus it is not surprising to hear some folk today not only regarding Islam as idolatrous but also as inherently demonic and occultic. This is an extremely dangerous approach which will destroy our witness to the Muslim people of the world and will result in a backlash rather than a positive receptiveness.

This brings us back to the whole question of love and compassion, the hallmarks of the Christian faith. Paul says "For the love of Christ constrains us" (2 Corinthians 5.14). Indeed it should. We need to exercise restraint in our attitude towards Islam and should never be misled into believing that the more we can downgrade and revile Islam, the more we can demonise it, the more we exalt the Christian faith above it. The laager was a good form of defence during the wars of the last century and an effective base from which to shoot at anything that opposed it from the outside. It is, on the contrary, a most inappropriate structure for reaching out beyond ourselves in selfless love and compassion towards the nations of the world, no matter to what extent they may oppose us. What are we ultimately aiming at - to win a case for Christianity or to win Muslims to Christ? As one Christian writer has said:

What matters is not that men have thought ill of Christianity but that they have forfeited the Christ. (Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p.248).

We must not suppose that we are acting in love towards the Muslims just because we are willing to give up much time and endure opposition to reach them with the Gospel. We can do all this and yet be most uncharitable in our attitude towards them. As Paul says, you can give away all you have and deliver your body up to be burned and yet not have love (1 Corinthians 13.3). I am quite persuaded that genuine love for the Muslims and a thoroughly militant approach just don't go together. Muslims must sense our love is genuine and respectful. The moment a Muslim detects a spirit of militancy in our approach to Islam, that moment our acceptance falls to the ground and it will be fatal for our witness.

Simon Peter said to Jesus "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22.49). Shall we? Will Jesus be constrained to say of us "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of, for the Son of man came not to destroy men's lives but to save them"? (Luke 9.55).

Instead of seeking causes to revile Islam we would do well to spend time studying its heritage and endeavour to relate more to Muslims where they are. Some have suggested that we should "love the Muslims and hate Islam". I think we are far more likely to succeed in genuinely loving the Muslims if we try rather to *understand* Islam. Christians who are willing to study the Qur'an, learn the history of Islam and respect Muslims for who they are (and evaluate their religion properly) are far more likely to attract them to the Gospel than those who revile Islam in ignorance. Muslims respect Christians who have a genuine knowledge of Islam but they are quickly alienated by those whom, they say, "just come to condemn us and our religion".

Muhammad was involved in a mighty struggle to rid his people of idolatry and bring them to worship the supreme God - *ar-Rahmaan* of the Jews and the Christians - alone. It is Christian intellectual dishonesty to now make him both an idol and an idolater. Christianity can never be boosted by downgrading Islam to the level of common idolatry. Let us not be fearful of respecting Islam - we have nothing after all to lose. Islam cannot threaten the existence of the Church (Matthew 16.18) and we have nothing to fear from it.

The charge of idolatry against Islam appears to be seriously unfounded when we remember that no Muslims have ever made images or idols of Muhammad as so many millions of Christians have done with Mary, Jesus, apostles and saints. Just walk around the cathedrals of Europe and see how infected Christian history is with images and icons, yet Muslims refrain from calling us idolaters. As Islam has kept itself free from the temptation to fashion similar images and idols of its own, it appears to be considerably presumptuous to accuse it of idolatry.

Brethren, "bear with my word of exhortation" (Hebrews 13.22). I do not want to come across too harshly, but I am deeply concerned for the future of Muslim evangelism in this country and the spirit of our approach which must always be motivated by love.

6. THE HALAAL SYMBOL - TOKEN OF A SACRIFICE?

Nowhere has the spirit of anti-Islamic militancy manifested itself more strongly than in the recent campaign against the Halaal symbol on many of our food products. In principle this symbol simply informs the Muslim public that the food is fit for consumption in terms of Islamic law. The very word *halaal* in Arabic simply means "loosed", that is, that it is free from the restrictions that apply to *haraam* ("forbidden") food products. These are defined in the Qur'an as "carrion, blood, the flesh of swine and that over which any name other than Allah's has been invoked" (Surah 5.4). The passage goes on to say "Eat what is caught for you, but pronounce the name of Allah over it" (Surah 5.5). Thus any animal or poultry product with the traditional Halaal symbol on it is lawful for Muslims as it indicates that it was properly slaughtered, the blood has been drained out of it, and the *tasmiyah-takbir* (*Bismillah Allahu-Akbar* - "In the name of God, God is Most Great") has been pronounced over it. The symbol stands solely for the benefit of the Muslim public, it is never applied as a means of gaining an advantage over adherents of other faiths or to bind them to Islamic rites as some have suggested.

The presence of the Halaal mark on other products (such as margarine and potato chips) is a sign to the Muslims that no forbidden substances, such as pig-fat, have been used in their composition. Indeed the Qur'an has a general exhortation to all mankind (*an-naas*) to eat of that which is in the earth that is "lawful and good" (*halaalan-tayyibaan*) - the word *halaal* here being used purely in a relative sense without any deliberate reference to the application of the name of Allah over the product, yet even where it is used in this latter sense it is really no different to the Jewish concept of *kosher* foods and substances.

In Old Testament times there were similar restrictions on food products, some of them being the same as those the Qur'an mentions, namely the prohibition on the flesh of swine (Leviticus 11.7) and blood (Leviticus 7.26). Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7.19), a decree which was later impressed on Simon Peter in a vision (Acts 10.9-16), yet even then some of the leaders of the early Church at Jerusalem still exhorted the Gentile believers to "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity" (Acts 15.29). In the context of the old covenant prohibitions on certain foods the Christian cannot object to the motive and principle behind the *halaal* laws of Islam. In a spirit of genuine Christian liberty we should not object to the Muslim's scruples at this point as they relate solely to the question of hygienic laws in Islam which are similar to those of Old Testament Judaism. There is no reason why we should be troubled at this point.

"Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat and no better off if we do" (1 Corinthians 8.8). The Christian should be concerned about far more important things in this new covenant age than scruples about food and drink. "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself ... For the kingdom of God does not mean food and drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14.14,17). Elsewhere Paul reproves certain Christians for their immaturity in having scruples ("do not handle, do not taste, do not touch") about foods "which all perish as they are used" (Colossians 2.22).

The very existence of a Christian campaign against Muslim scruples about food products is in the circumstances highly questionable on the grounds of New Testament teaching about Christian liberty and maturity, yet the actual nature of the campaign against the Halaal symbol itself can be challenged on a number of other grounds. It is defined by Ds. Zevenster in his pamphlet *Halaal and the Christian* as follows: "The Halaal sign tells us that Halaal foods have been consecrated to a strange god. Therefore, as Christians, we should not eat these foods". He also speaks of Halaal foods as having been consecrated "to an idol". In a public lecture recorded on tape he

went on to say "Halaal kos is gekoppel aan afgode - laat hom staan" (Halaal food is linked to idols - leave it alone) and constantly spoke of such foods as "afgodskos" (food sacrificed to idols) which had been offered to the "false god Allah".

We have already shown that the charge of idolatry against Islam is based on false premises, yet here we must also disown the suggestion that Halaal foods have been offered in sacrifice. This claim has no foundation in Islamic law or history. There is only one prescribed sacrifice in Islam, the *qurbani* sacrifice at the end of the Eid al-Adha festival in remembrance of Abraham's willingness to give his son to God. On this occasion the food of the animals sacrificed is simply distributed to the poor and it is purely an act of commemoration without any sense of a prior consecration to Allah. The Halaal symbol on a food product is purely an indication that it is fit for Muslim consumption as its preparation has been in compliance with the hygienic laws of the Qur'an which we have already mentioned. In no way whatsoever is the Halaal mark on such a product a sign that it has been sacrificed, least of all to an idol or false god.

Why, then, are such suggestions so vigorously pursued by certain Christians? One can only presume that the motive is one of pure anti-Islamic opportunism. Once it is conceded that Halaal in Islam is very much the same as the Kosher principle of Judaism, one can hardly raise any real objections to it. Once it is distorted, however, into the claim that it represents food sacrificed to an idol, then the antagonist creates a cause of offence. There are texts in the New Testament which speak out against the eating of foods so sacrificed to idols (Revelation 2.14, 2.20) and in his first letter to the Corinthians Paul gives circumstances under which such foods should not be eaten. These texts are then brought forth as proofs that Christians should not eat Halaal foods and should also campaign against the Muslim practice by which these are produced.

Even here, however, the argument has been taken too far. The New Testament does not outlaw the consumption of foods sacrificed to idols altogether and in the references from Paul's letter we can see that it was only in two cases that the Apostle cautioned against the consumption of such foods, namely where a weaker brother might be offended by thinking that there really was something in the idol to whom it had been offered (1 Corinthians 8.7) and where a pagan worshipper himself might have his conscience disturbed if he saw a Christian eating such foods which had been ritually consecrated to an idol (1 Corinthians 10.28-29). On both occasions, however, Paul showed that it was only for the sake of the consciences of weaker brethren and pagans that the Christian should abstain, not because there was anything wrong in principle with the practice itself of eating such foods.

"Eat whatever is set before you", Paul said, "without raising any question on the grounds of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10.27) and he added that "a man of knowledge" (that is, a mature Christian with a correct perspective on Christian liberty in this matter - 1 Corinthians 8.10) could freely eat foods that pagans had sacrificed because their idols, in any event, had no real existence and the food could not therefore be affected in any way (1 Cor. 8.4).

There is, therefore, nothing wrong in principle with eating food sacrificed to idols - the exceptions applying solely to consideration for the weak consciences of others - and all food created by God is good and to be received with thanksgiving, consecrated in our case by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4.3-5).

It is obvious that the anti-halaal campaign is based on extremely weak arguments. It not only requires a crude distortion of Islamic teaching on the subject but also a misrepresentation of Biblical principles to assert itself. Christianity does not need to degrade the beliefs of others to maintain itself. We really need to show consistency and sustain a truthful attitude towards Islam at this point - nothing can be gained from pure revulsion.

7. MILITANCY OR LOVE? - THE SPIRIT OF OUR RESPONSE.

During his public lecture on the Halaal symbol Ds. Zevenster complained that the Muslim influence in our society was a *gevaar* (danger), a *bedreiging* (threat) and an attempt to *intimideer ons* (intimidate us). These expressions are the language of fear, a natural reaction when someone feels his vested interests are being threatened. Should Christians react to Islam out of fear or should they not rather give themselves to the task of winning Muslims for Christ? As we have seen the latter course can only be achieved if it is motivated by love for

the Muslims, what Paul called the "still more excellent way". As another apostle put it, "there is no room for fear in love" (1 John 4.18). We need to reach out to the Muslims, we must resist the temptation to lash out at them.

Can Islam ultimately do anything to threaten the existence of the Church or prevent its ultimate triumph? When Jesus Christ died and rose again, did the battle end or was it just beginning? Is the outcome of his redeeming work dependent on our efforts and sweat or was it guaranteed by his resurrection?

The New Testament plainly shows that the final victory over sin, death and all the powers of the devil was gained at the cross (Colossians 2.13-15). When Christians set about witnessing to the world and preach the Gospel they are not fighting a battle for God whose outcome will depend on the intensity of their efforts. They are merely seeking the spoils of victory. Every convert is yet another proof of Christ's invasion of the devil's realm and a sign of the ultimate fate of the powers of evil - they are destined to destruction when Jesus returns again, when the kingdoms of this world will "become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 11.15).

It is so often said that the Church must engage in the work of mission, but here too it would seem more appropriate to consider it as the *outworking* of mission - the gathering in of the people of God whose destiny was assured at the cross. Jesus said "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6.44) which shows that the success of Christian mission depends not on our efforts but upon God's call. In full confidence, however, Jesus could say "All that the Father gives me will come to me ... and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up at the last day" (John 6.37,39). He could also say, as he faced the cross, "Of those whom thou gavest me I have lost none" (John 18.9). When he hung on the cross he had no uncertainty about the outcome of his saving work - he knew the Father would certainly draw to him all that he had given him and that they would be raised to glory at the Last Day.

When he makes himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand; he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied.
Isaiah 53.10-11.

The conversion of Saul, later to be called the Apostle Paul, is a fine example of this fact. If ever the devil had a volunteer to destroy the whole Christian Church and wipe it out, it was Saul of Tarsus. One could say he was the General of Satan's army. He instigated such a great persecution against the early Church in Jerusalem that all the believers were scattered except the apostles. "Saul laid waste the Church" (Acts 8.3) and, determined to destroy it, he made his way to Damascus. Suddenly Jesus appeared to him in a glorious vision and appointed him to be his Apostle to the whole Gentile world.

The question might well be asked - could Saul have resisted the call of Jesus to become the Apostle Paul, the General of the Lord's army? However one might reply, Paul himself said "He set me apart before I was born, he called me through his grace, and he was pleased to reveal his Son in me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Galatians 1.15). The Apostle's response was simply "I found myself caught up in God's purposes for me".

The key question, however, is - could the devil have resisted the call of Jesus? It is almost as if the two armies spoken of in Revelation 19.19 were standing opposite each other, and the king of the one, Jesus, went to the ruler of the other, Satan, and said "Who is the leading soldier in your ranks?" After Saul had been pointed out to him, Jesus, so it appears, simply said "Thank you, I will have him for myself"! What could the devil do to stop him? When Ananias complained to the Lord that Saul was known to be the archenemy of the Church, Jesus simply said to him "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine" (Acts 9.15). *I have called him*, he said, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

So today there is nothing Islam can do to stop the Lord Jesus drawing out whoever he wishes from the Muslim ranks to become his disciples. And there is nothing Islam can do to thwart the predetermined progress of the Church towards its coming glory. So there is nothing to fear, nothing to protect. We are free to love the Muslims without having to worry about any of their aims and objectives.

There is a deep need for a genuinely charitable approach towards Islam. The militant approach is no more suitable today than it was in the days of the Crusades. It is very interesting to discover that in Muhammad's own time the Christians he came into contact with clearly showed him a spirit of love and hospitality. The Qur'an says of them:

You will find those who are nearest in love to the believers to be those who say, "We are Christians" because among them are men devoted to learning and self-denial, and they are not arrogant. *Surah 5.85*

Christians should always be "nearest in love" to all they come into contact with and the adherents of other faiths. An attitude of caring and concern for their well-being, both temporally and eternally, should come spontaneously to us and should be the overriding factor in our dealings with all men. "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the Gospel of God but even our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thessalonians 2.8). It does not matter whether the world responds with gratitude or hostility, receptiveness or militancy, good or evil, the Christian's disposition towards the world must always be conditioned by the love of God that has been so fully revealed in Jesus Christ, and his goal in his relationships with his fellow-men must ever be that which is expressed in the chorus: "Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me".

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A study of the word "love" in the Qur'an

Hubb Allah fi al-Qur'an

Farid Mahally

One of the most compact, penetrating discourses on love is found in I John 4:7-21. The word is used 27 times in these verses. The central basis for men to love one another is rooted in the nature of God Himself. "God is love." What is accepted as commonplace in Christianity is a dim reflection in the Qur'an. While "God is great" [Allahu akbar] is a statement of faith, affirmation and expression, "God is love" [Allahu muhibba] is absent from the attributes of God. Such a profound contrast between the two religions, Islam and Christianity, demands an inquiry as to why. Since Christians are known as "the people of the book" referred to in the Qur'an, it is appropriate for us to look at the Muslim holy book to seek to discern those elements of God's character described therein. This article seeks to categorize and analyze the various Qur'anic verses that incorporate the word "love."

The translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali has been chosen for this study, as it is probably the most popular bi-lingual version used in English speaking countries. The side-by-side English-Arabic allows for a crosscheck on the choice of English words. The translation itself tends to be interpretive and sometimes propagandistic rather than literal so occasionally the English word "love" is used without linguistic warrant. These will be noted in the paper. The writer has included within brackets the Arabic transliteration of the words under consideration so that those acquainted with the language may note the verbal or noun form. For those who do not know Arabic, at least one can note that there are various words that are used.

As noted, Christians are referred to as "the people of the book." While it would have been interesting to include the references from the large body of *Hadith* of the word *love*, it is outside the parameter of this study. While Muslims hold the *Hadith* in high esteem, there is controversy as to whether they bear equal authority with the Qur'an. Many *hadith* (traditions) state that God said thus and so. But since the witness is based on the report of a hearer, its authenticity is really a value judgment expressed by the integrity of the collector. Suffice it to say that another investigation could be made into the various uses in the *Hadith*. Bukhari lists 95 uses of *love* and 36 of *loved*. Muslim lists 22 usages of *love* and 4 for *loved*. Abu Dawud lists only 10 for *love*, one for *loved*. Malik's Muwatta lists *love* 12 times and *loved* 4 times. Considering the substantial amount of material in their texts, even in abbreviated form, this seems rather limited. Most of these have to do with human love or love of things and only a limited number referring to God's love. This is in distinct contrast with the Bible, which list 409 uses of *love*. The New Testament alone lists 223 uses.

The word love, *hubb* in its various grammatical forms, is used 69 times in the Qur'an. The writer has divided these into five categories:

- (1) Man's love of things.
- (2) Human love.
- (3) Man's love for God.
- (4) God's love in the negative sense, i.e. "God loveth not ..."
- (5) God's love for man.

(1) Man's Love of Things (15 times)

As one looks at the collection of verses scattered through 13 *surahs*, where the word *love* is employed, one observes that the use of the word carries a negative meaning. A repeated theme concerns those who love the world.

14:3 Those who *love* [istahib] the life of this world more than the Hereafter, who hinder (men) from the Path of Allah and seek therein something crooked: They are astray by a long distance.

16:107 This because they *love* [istahib] the life of this world better than the Hereafter: And Allah will not guide those who reject Faith.

75:20 Nay, (ye men!) But ye *love* [hubb] the fleeting life,

76:27 As to these, they *love* [hubb] the fleeting life, and put away behind them a Day (that will be) hard.

89:20 And ye *love* [hubb] wealth with inordinate *love*!

100:8 And violent is he in his *love* [hubb n.] of wealth.

The above theme is more fully defined in Surah 3:14

3:14 Fair in the eyes of men is the *love* [hubb] of things they covet: Women and sons; heaped-up hoards of gold and silver; horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (to return to).

This emphasis on the love of things is further defined in Surah 3:92

3:92 By no means shall ye attain righteousness unless ye give (freely) of that which ye *love*; [hubb] and whatever ye give, of a truth Allah knoweth it well.

Here again is reference to loving wealth and things, but that righteousness is attained by giving or spending [*nafuq*] for what one loves. Thus, these verses come closest to the Biblical injunction "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world." I John 2:15

Other verses in this category refer to:

The hesitance of believers to engage in battle:

2:216 Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye *love* [hubb] a thing which is bad for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.

Pride and hypocrisy:

3:188 Think not that those who exult in what they have brought about, and *love* [hubb] to be praised for what they have not done, -- think not that they can escape the Penalty. For them is a Penalty grievous indeed.

Idolatry:

6:76 When the night covered him over, he saw a star: He said: "This is my Lord." But when it set, He said: "**I love** [hubb] not those that set." (This passage is a reference to Abraham when he rejected heavenly objects as being divine.)

Rejection of counsel:

7:79 So Salih left them, saying: "O my people! I did indeed convey to you the message for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel, but ye **love** [hubb] not good counsellors!"

Warning against those who love infidelity above faith:

9:23 O ye who believe! Take not for protectors your fathers and your brothers if they **love** [istahib] infidelity above Faith: If any of you do so, they do wrong.

Those publishing scandal:

24:19 Those who **love** [hubb] (to see) scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: Allah knows, and ye know not.

The promise of victory:

61:13 And another (favor will He bestow), which ye do **love** [hubb], -- help from Allah and a speedy victory. So give the Glad Tidings to the Believers.

The majority of the verses above reflect basically a negative use of the word *love*. It is used of loving inappropriate or wrong things. The sole positive verse concerns loving God's help and favor in victory. Are we seeing here an Arabic preference for stating things in the negative in order to reinforce a point? "There is no god, but God," uses the negative to enforce the positive.

(2) Human Love (15 Times)

(Hubb - 5 times; Mawadda - 7 times; Interpretive insert - 3 times)

The five usages of love [**hubb**] in the sense of human love are found in the following Qur'anic *surahs*:

3:119 Ah! Ye are those who **love** [hubb] them, but they **love** [hubb] you not, -- though ye believe in the whole of the Book. When they meet you they say, "We believe": But when they are alone, they bite off the very tips of their fingers at you in their rage. Say: "Perish in your rage; Allah knoweth well all the secrets of the heart."

This is referring to those outside the ranks of believers. The believers may show love to them, but this love is not reciprocated. It is only a feigned love and when the unbelievers are away, they rail against the believers.

12:8 They said: "Truly Joseph and his brother are **loved** [ahubb] more by our father than we: But we are a goodly body! Really our father is obviously wandering (in his mind)!"

The passage refers to the Old Testament record of the jealousy of Joseph's brothers who are disturbed that Jacob loves Joseph and Benjamin more than the other sons. Here is an instance where fatherly love creates resentment in men's hearts.

12:30 Ladies said in the City: "The wife of the (great) Aziz is seeking to seduce her slave from his (true) self: Truly hath he inspired her with violent **love** [Hubb n.]: We see she is evidently going astray [shghfaha hubban anan].

This refers to Potiphar's wife. Here is an instance where love is described as erotic by emphasizing that it was violent or intense. The Greek language with its various words to express erotic, brotherly or real love provides a more precise definition for such cases.

28:56 It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one whom thou **lovest**; [hubb] but Allah guides those whom He will. And He knows best those who receive guidance.

The occasion of this verse was the death of Abu Talib, an uncle whom Muhammad loved. This implies that Muhammad would not be able to guide everyone he loved, nor expect to do so. There would be those who would hold to their beliefs in spite of his own personal desire.

Mawadda

5:85 Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in *love* [mawadda] to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.

29:25 And he said: "For you, ye have taken (for worship) idols besides Allah, out of mutual *love* [mawadda] and regard between yourselves in this life; but on the Day of Judgment ye shall disown each other and curse each other: And your abode will be the Fire, and ye shall have none to help."

30:21 And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has put *love* [mawadda] and mercy between your [hearts]: Verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.

42:23 That is (the Bounty) whereof Allah gives Glad Tidings to His Servants who believe and do righteous deeds. Say: "No reward do I ask of you for this except the *love* [mawadda] of those near of kin. " And if any one earns any good, We shall give him an increase of good in respect thereof: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Ready to appreciate (service).

60:1 O ye who believe! Take not My enemies and yours as friends [or protectors], -- offering them (your) *love*, [mawadda] even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in Allah your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of *love* (and friendship) [mawadda] with them: For I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the Straight Path.

60:7 It may be that Allah will grant *love* (and friendship) [mawadda] between you and those whom ye (now) hold as enemies. For Allah has power (over all things); and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

The word *mawadda* carries the sense of love and friendship. The verbal form *wadda* is similar to: "to like, be fond of." Various other verbal forms convey the idea of becoming friends or to show affection. Thus the usage above conveys those expressions of friendship among men. Here is a more positive emphasis to love others. There is also the teaching in surah 5:85 that the Christians are the closest in friendship to the believing Muslim.

Interpretative Inserts

14:37 "O our Lord! I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation, by Thy Sacred House; in order, O our Lord, that they may establish regular Prayer: So fill the hearts of some among men with *love* towards them, and feed them with Fruits: So that they may give thanks.

The literal sense here is "induce the hearts of people towards them." The addition of the word love is by inference, but in keeping with the sense of the phrase.

3:103 And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favor on you; for ye were enemies and He joined your hearts in *love*, so that by His Grace, ye became brethren; and ye were on the brink of the Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus doth Allah make His Signs clear to you: That ye may be guided. [Interpretive insert]

7:189 It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in *love*). When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about

(unnoticed). When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord, (saying): "If Thou givest us a goodly child. We vow we shall (ever) be grateful." [Interpretive insert]

It is only for completeness that we include these three verses. The word love in all cases is an interpretative insert by the translator Yusuf Ali. 3:103 implies that God's favor or grace united their hearts. In 7:189 the insertion of *love* is perhaps added due to the verse context of a conjugal relationship that results in a child.

(3) Man's Love for God (7 times)

(*Raghiban, anab, uruban* - once each, interpretive insert - twice)

2:165 Yet there are men who take (for worship) others besides Allah, as equal (with Allah): They *love* [hubb] them as they should *love* [Hubb] Allah but those of Faith are overflowing in their *love* [hubb n.] for Allah. If only the unrighteous could see, behold, they would see the Penalty: that to Allah belongs all power, and Allah will strongly enforce the Penalty.

This is an interesting verse as the word *love* [hubb] is used for idolaters as well as for true lovers of God. The implication being that their love is real, but misdirected. True worshipers are said to be overflowing in their love for God. Here the noun form is used.

2:177 It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards the East or West; but it is righteousness -- to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of *love* for Him, [‘ala hubbahu] for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and to practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain (or suffering) and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the Allah-fearing.

Here love for God is indicated as a motivational factor of believers along with love for kin, orphans, the needy, and others for which one spends of his substance.

38:32 And he said, "Truly do I *love* [hubb] the *love* [hubb n.] of Good, with a view to the glory of my Lord," -- Until (the sun) was hidden in the veil (of Night):

The reference is to King David who loved fine horses. Horses of high breed were brought to him to admire, but he first sought to make his evening prayers before examining the horses. This is nowhere mentioned in the Old Testament, but mention is made of Solomon's love of horses.

76:8 And they feed, for the *love* of Allah, [‘ala hubbahu] the indigent, the orphan, and the captive, -

76:9 (Saying), "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: No reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.

This refers to the righteous and their deeds of caring for the less fortunate.

21:90 So We listened to him: And We granted him Yahya: We cured his wife's (barrenness) for him. These [three] were ever quick in emulation in good works: They used to call on Us with *love* [raghiban] and reverence, and humble themselves before Us.

This refers to Zacharia, his wife and John the Baptist. The expression literally means "torn between greed and fear," or "between desire and fear." Thus they called on God because they desired Him, which desire was tempered with respect.

31:15 "But if they strive to make thee join in worship with Me things of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not; yet bear them company in this life with justice (and consideration), and follow the way of those who turn to Me (in *love*): In the End the return of you all is to Me, and I will tell you the truth (and meaning) of all that ye did." [Interpolated] [anab]

This is an interpretive insertion by the translator. The expression means, "to turn repentantly to God." Or "to visit frequently." In the context it means to join those who have rejected idols and turned to God.

56:37 **Beloved** [‘uruban] (by nature), equal in age, -- (companions of the right hand in paradise) [interpretive]

The passage refers to those enjoying the pleasures of paradise and the delights of the companions who are virgins. The phrase is somewhat difficult to render. It is composed of only two Arabic words. *`uruban atraban*. A possible rendering would be "true Arab companions." i.e. suitable companions for Arabs. This ethnically awkward wording may have prompted the translator to choose "Beloved (by nature)" to approximate the sense for non-Arab readers. Maulana Muhammad Ali in his translation renders the phrase *loving, equals in age*.

4:69 All who obey Allah and the Apostle are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah, -- Of the Prophets (who teach), the Sincere (**lovers of Truth**), [sadiqiyeen] the Witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! What a beautiful Fellowship! [Interpretive insert]

57:19 And those who believe in Allah and His apostles -- they are the Sincere (**lovers of Truth**), [sadiqiyeen] and the Witnesses (who testify), in the eyes of their Lord: They shall have their Reward and their Light. But those who reject Allah and deny Our Signs, -- they are the Companions of Hellfire. [Interpretive insert]

The preceding two verses are interpretative inserts. The translation of *sadiqiyeen* as "lovers of truth" is commendable, but the meaning indicates those who are righteous and faithful and so by implication they are ones who love truth.

(4) Negative - God Does Not Love The ... (22 times)

Here in this selection of verses we notice again the Arabic preference for the negative to state an opposite. While the following do not state that God hates, it certainly enforces the idea that the love of God is withheld from those who practice certain deeds or are described as manifesting a certain character. Several of the verses are repetitious and so we have the following categories.

1. God does not love the al-mua'tadeen Those involved in brutal aggression.

Those who are overstepping the boundaries or limits.

2:190 Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors [la uhibb al-mua'tadeen]

5:90 O ye who Believe! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah hath made lawful for you, but commit no excess: For Allah loveth not those given to excess [la uhibb al-mua'tadeen]

7:55 Call on your Lord with humility and in private: For Allah loveth not those who trespass beyond bounds. [la uhibb al-mua'tadeen]

2. God does not love the al-fasideen, the corrupt.

2:205 When he turns his back, his aim everywhere is to spread mischief through the earth and destroy crops and cattle. But Allah loveth [hubb] not mischief. [alfsad]

5:67 The Jews say: "Allah's hand is tied up." Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for the (blasphemy) they utter. Nay, both His hands are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth. But the revelation that cometh to thee from Allah increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. Amongst them We have placed enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgement. Every time they kindle the fire of war, Allah doth extinguish it; but they (ever) strive to do mischief on earth. And Allah loveth [hubb] not those who do mischief [al-mufasideen]

28:77 "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion in this world: But do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: For Allah loves [hubb] not those who do mischief." [al-mufasideen]

The word *al-mufasideen* is actually much stronger than the translation of "Mischief," by the translator. The Arabic word conveys the stronger idea of corruption, decay, and decomposition. In the moral sense it becomes depravity, iniquity, perversion and in today's usage implies immorality. Thus, this is not referring to people who

may have done mischievous things, but one who has fallen into corruption and immorality. The translator may not have been aware of the weakened sense of the word *mischief* in our English of today.

3. God loves not the al-kafireen, the unbelievers.

In the following verse, the intensive form of the word is used to indicate one who is an inveterate unbeliever. One who practices the rejection of truth. The use of *ungrateful* falls short of the intensive meaning of the Arabic word.

2:276 Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity: For He loveth [hubb] not creatures ungrateful and wicked. [kul kffar]

3:32 Say: "Obey Allah and His Apostle": But if they turn back, Allah loveth [hubb] not those who reject Faith. [al kafireen]

30:45 That He may reward those who believe and work righteous deeds, out of His Bounty. For He loves [hubb] not those who reject Faith. [al-kafireen]

4. God loves not the ad-dalemeen, the wrongdoers.

The word is related to darkness, gloominess and by extension to the heinous oppressor, the unjust tyrant. Thus the one who practices wrong.

3:57 "As to those who believe and work righteousness, Allah will pay them (in full) their reward; but Allah loveth [hubb] not those who do wrong." [ad-dalemeen]

3:140 If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days (of varying fortunes) we give to men and men by turns: That Allah may know those that believe and that He may take to Himself from your ranks martyr-witnesses (to Truth). And Allah loveth [hubb] not those that do wrong. [ad-dalemeen]

42:40 The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): But if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: For [Allah] loveth [hubb] not those who do wrong. [ad-dalemeen]

5. God loves not the musarifeen, the wasters.

6:141 It is He who produceth gardens, with trellises and without, and dates, and tilth with produce of all kinds, and olives and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in variety): Eat of their fruit in their season, but render the dues that are proper on the day that the harvest is gathered. But waste not by excess: For Allah loveth [hubb] not the wasters [al-musarifeen]

7:31 O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: Eat and drink: But waste not by excess, for Allah loveth [hubb] not the wasters. [al-musarifeen]

6. God loves not the boaster.

31:18 "And swell not thy cheek (for pride) at men, nor walk in insolence through the earth; for Allah loveth [hubb] not any arrogant boaster. [kul mkhtal fkhur]

57:23 In order that ye may not despair over matters that pass you by, nor exult over favors bestowed upon you. For Allah loveth [hubb] not any vainglorious boaster, -- [kul mkhtal fkhur]

4:36 Serve Allah, and join not any partners with Him; and do good -- to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers, the Companion by your side, the wayfarer (ye meet), and what your right hands possess: For Allah loveth [hubb] not the arrogant, the vainglorious; -- [mkhtalan fkhur]

7. God loves not the proud and boasting.

16:23 Undoubtedly Allah doth know what they conceal, and what they reveal: Verily He loveth [hubb]

not the arrogant. [al-mustakibereen]

8. God loves not those who boast in their riches.

28:76 Qarun was doubtless, of the people of Moses; but he acted insolently towards them: Such were the treasures We had bestowed on him, that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men. Behold, his people said to him: "Exult not, for Allah loveth [hubb] not those who exult (in riches). [al-fraheen]

9. God loves not the treacherous.

8:58 If thou fearest treachery from any group, throw back (their Covenant) to them, (so as to be) on equal terms: For Allah loveth [hubb] not the treacherous. [al-kha'ineen]

10. God does not love those who are given to crime and to evil speaking.

4:107 Contend not on behalf of such as betray their own souls; for Allah loveth [hubb] not one given to perfidy and crime;

4:148 Allah loveth [hubb] not that evil should be noised abroad in public speech, except where injustice hath been done; for Allah is He who heareth and knoweth all things.

(5) God's love for Man (20 times)

Here we find a few categories of individuals who are recipients of God's love because of their deeds. One would think these positive statements of God's love would bring us a revelation of the personal and infinite love of God to mankind. What we find are statements of conditional love based on human activity.

1. God loves those who do good.

The *muhasneen* or those who do good deeds [*hasanats*]. In some contexts, it implies giving of one's money or goods for Allah's cause.

2:195 And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth [hubb] those who do good. [al-muhasneen]

3:134 Those who spend (freely), whether in prosperity, or in adversity; who restrain anger, and pardon (all) men; -- for Allah loves [hubb] those who do good; -- [al-muhasaneen]

3:148 And Allah gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the Hereafter. For Allah loveth [hubb] those who do good. [al-muhasaneen]

5:14 But because of their breach of their Covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard: They change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the Message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them -- barring a few -- ever bent on [new] deceits: But forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds): For Allah loveth [hubb] those who are kind. [al-muhasaneen]

5:96 On those who believe and do deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past), when they guard themselves from evil, and believe, and do deeds of righteousness, -- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and believe, -- (or) again, guard themselves from evil and do good. For Allah loveth [hubb] those who do good. [al-muhasaneen]

2. God loves the pure and clean:

2:222 They ask thee concerning women's courses. Say: They are a hurt and a pollution: So keep away from women in their courses, and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves, ye may approach them in any manner, time, or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah *loves* those who turn to Him constantly and He loves [hubb] those who keep themselves pure and clean. [al-mutdhreen]

9:108 Never stand thou forth therein. There is a mosque whose foundation was laid from the first day on piety; it is more worthy of thy standing forth [for prayer] therein. In it are men who **love** to be purified; and Allah **loveth** [hubb] those who make themselves pure. [al-mutadhreen]

3. God loves those who are righteous:

3:76 Nay. -- Those that keep their plighted faith and act aright, -- verily Allah loves [hubb] those who act aright. [al-mutaqeen]

9:4 (But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfill your engagements with them to the end of their term: For Allah loveth [hubb] the righteous. [al-mutaqeen]

9:7 How can there be a league, before Allah and His Apostle, with the Pagans, except those with whom ye made a treaty near the Sacred Mosque? As long as these stand true to you, stand ye true to them: For Allah doth love [hubb] the righteous. [al-mutaqeen]

19:96 On those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, will (Allah) Most Gracious bestow love. [arraḥman wdan] [Interpretive insert, the thought is that God will bestow benevolence]

4. God loves those who are just and judge rightly:

5:45 (They are fond of) listening to falsehood, of devouring anything forbidden. If they do come to thee, either judge between them, or decline to interfere. If thou decline, they cannot hurt thee in the least. If thou judge, judge in equity between them. For Allah loveth [hubb] those who judge in equity. [al-muqasiteen]

49:9 If two parties among the Believers fall into a quarrel, make ye peace between them: But if one of them transgresses beyond bounds against the other, then fight ye (all) against the one that transgresses until it complies with the command of Allah; but if it complies, then make peace between them with justice, and be fair: For Allah loves [hubb] those who are fair (and just). [al-muqasiteen]

60:8 Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for [your] Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: For Allah loveth [hubb] those who are just [al-muqasiteen]

5. God loves those who trust Him:

3:159 It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: So pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves [hubb] those who put their trust (in Him). [al-mutawakileen]

6. God loves the persevering or patient:

3:146 How many of the Prophets fought (in Allah's way), and with them [fought] large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in Allah's way, nor did they weaken [in will] nor give in. And Allah loves [hubb] those who are firm and steadfast. [as-sabreen]

7. God loves those who love Him and follow the Prophet:

3:31 Say: "If ye do love [hubb] Allah, follow me: Allah will love [ihbbikum] you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

8. God Himself will produce a people He will love:

5:57 O ye who believe! If any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love [hubb] as they will love [hubb] Him, -- Lowly with the Believers, Mighty against the Rejecters, Fighting in the Way of Allah, and never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault. That is the Grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He pleaseth. And Allah encompasseth all, and He knoweth all things.

9. God loved Moses:

20:39 "Throw (the child) into the chest, and throw (the chest) into the river: The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him': But I cast (the garment of) love over thee [muhibba minahu] from Me: And (this) in order that thou mayest be reared under Mine eye. (This passage relates the placing of Moses in the bulrushes and his subsequent adoption by Pharaoh's daughter and God's care of him.)

10. God loves those who fight in His cause:

61:4 Truly Allah loves [hubb] those who fight in His Cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure.

The 99 names of God

As mentioned previously in the introduction, *Allahu Muhibba* or "God is love" is not found among the 99 names of God given in Islam. There is however, the name *Al-Wadud* or "the Loving One," which is found in Surah 11:90 as well as Surah 85:14. In each case the translator translates "full of loving kindness." This is interesting in itself since it indicates that this quality lies imbedded in the nature of God himself and of course would then be infinite. However, Islam is careful in stating that we cannot in any way know the nature of God. We can only know His will. The Arabic word "wadud" is related more to the area of friendship and affection. It is applied to one devoted in a relationship and expresses fondness. The word "*hubb*" carries a much more intense meaning and is used in its other grammatical forms for "beloved," "sweetheart," "courtship," "lover," and "mutual affection." It is also elastic, as our use of love in English, where one might express his love for sports, movies, food or other common day interests. However, any attribute when applied to God Himself then takes on an infinite value and meaning.

It is here that the Muslim reaches an impasse. The 99 names; are they to be taken as attributes or qualities of Allah? The doctrine of *tawhid* or the oneness of God claims priority over any other consideration of God. If one says that the 99 names are attributes of the Most High God and are then infinite, how then can God be One? If an attribute is a part of God then *tawhid* says that we have "*shirk*" or a partner with God, a heinous blasphemy against God who is One. Anything that is infinite must be God and how then can we have a multiplicity of gods?

Muslims are then driven to speak of the unity of God, but in reality they mean the "unicity" or absolute oneness of God. If God is One then He cannot have any parts. And to speak of attributes implies that God is somehow relying on His inward parts to sustain His existence. This can create misunderstanding between Christians, who are Trinitarian, and Muslims who are extreme monotheists. For the Christian, "unity" in reference to God implies a Oneness of the Three Persons of the Godhead. Any attribute of God is an expression of His nature and not simply a description of an action or command He has taken. Any action or command springs from His nature. Attributes may in no way compromise His unity. For the Muslim "unity" implies the absolute oneness of God's being. While "unicity" is not commonly used in English, Webster gives its definition as "the state of being unique." This word more accurately describes the Muslim use of unity. So any thinking of the attributes of God as being part of His nature is rejected in Muslim theology.

While we certainly concede that God is indeed unique, we contend with the Muslim in asking for a definition. "One what?" Their reply would be "One God, for God is unknowable except through His will. We can know nothing about the nature of God except through the command He has given through His prophet. We can only do His will, we cannot know Him."

Here is where the strongest point of difference is most pronounced between Christianity and Islam. The Qur'an is a revelation of God's will that is to be obeyed by His creation. The Bible is a revelation of the Person and character of God. It is here where we find what God is like and what that means in our relation to Him. God is Spirit, God is Light, God is Love, are all statements of the revelation of God's person and character. One of the problems in dealing with the attributes of an eternal God is: how was God expressing in action what was integral to His character when no creation yet existed? In other words, if God is One, who did God love when He was the only One existing? For the Christian the answer lies in the relationship that has always existed in the fellowship

of the Trinity. A strict monotheism that is occupied with a number that knows no plurality cannot conceive of the inward nature of a loving God. A powerful God whose will must be obeyed in order to maintain his power, yes. But a risk-taking God who is limited by His own exercise of His nature, no.

So now we come to the crux of why we deemed it important to investigate the Qur'anic teaching on the love of God. What we have observed is that while the Qur'an tells of the love of God, in most cases it is expressed in a negative fashion, "God loves not ..." or it is based upon human conditions for its exercise. God loves the one who does good, the pure, the just, the trusting, the patient and persevering, the one who takes up arms to fight in God's cause. But where is there room for a God who initiates love in order to win over the lost and erring? Where is He who loved us while we were yet sinners? Where is there room for the one who was rich, yet for our sakes became poor so that we might be made rich? The contrast is too great to overlook. Could we not also reply that, yes, we too love those who do good and are just and demonstrate good qualities. But that would mean that God only expresses a human love if His love is based on conditions. A revelation of infinite love demands something of the extraordinary, something commiserate with the nature and character of God Himself. The cross is the only historical expression of that love.

Conclusions:

For those acquainted with the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Qur'anic commentary of God's love is striking in its paucity, and in its human-like description of God's love to mankind. Jesus said in Luke 6:32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."

If God then only loves those who love Him, or do good, or are pure then this love is not above or beyond man's love since man also loves and appreciates such people. But a love that goes beyond the surface and loves the unlovable and seeks to win over even the most wicked and rebellious can only be a manifestation of the One who is love.

In I John chapter four, love is used some 27 times.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

9 In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His one and only Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.

15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

16 And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

19 We love Him because He first loved us.

20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Further, we have the testimony from God who states to His own:

"I will never leave you nor forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

"Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. Jeremiah 31:3

"The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Luke 19:10

One could say that Jesus is God's love expressed in History.

One final passage that emphasizes that the relationship of the believer to the Lord is based in love is found in Ephesians. It is in fact the nature of God that dwells in the believer to produce love and to fill the believer with the fullness of God's presence.

Ephesians 3: 14-19

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height --

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Thus the real goal of the believer is the personal knowledge of the nature and person of God. That Islam rejects this possibility serves only to affirm the distinction between Islam and Christianity and confirms the riches we enjoy as believers in Jesus Christ.

Is Allah the God of the Bible?

In an article on the Islamic newsgroup somebody wrote:

... It is clear from the way the passages [in the Qur'an] are constructed that the God making His revelation to the prophet Mohammed considers Himself to be the same God that made revelations to these other prophets. Consequently, the Allah of the Holy Quran is, in fact, the God of the Old and New Testaments.

Now, of course, if you consider one text or the other to be false, then there are two separate gods being referred to, one false, one true. But textually, the Holy Quran is directly linked (through references to people and events) to the Old and New Testaments.

Even if the Qur'an is not from God I would not expect anything else.

Let me give you an illustration to make clear why.

Suppose you read two interviews with an important person [president of the US or whomever you fancy to imagine] in two different newspapers.

You read them closely and you find that they are mightily contradictory so that you start wondering if those statements really can come from the same source. But both claim that they had an interview with the President at the White House and that that is exactly what the President told them. But taken together they just don't make sense.

You do some research and find out that one of them really had an interview. But the other journalist was denied the interview. For some reason [pressure from the newspaper : you write this interview or you are fired or any other imaginable reason] he needs this interview, and comes to the conclusion that he knows enough about the President already to be able to make one up.

But obviously he has to make it look real. So he writes as if it is real. The president will refer back to his earlier successes, his earlier interviews where he said things to point out that he kept his promises, etc etc. just like a real interview MIGHT have been.

It is so skilfully done, one might not even have found the fraud if there hadn't been the real interview and the two just are so much at odds that they can't both be true.

Obviously, both the real and the fake one do write about the SAME President. The difference is not the topic, not the *claimed source* of the interview, the difference is that one *is* authorised by the President and the other is not.

Yes, the Qur'an talks about the same God. And it obviously takes great pains to connect this same God back to what he might have said if he had given revelation. Sure, both books are talking about the same God but the question is whether they are both from the same source. Is the God they are both talking about actually the source of both of them?

Well, Qur'an and Bible are very much similar in many things, just as the reporter who was denied the interview would be able from earlier sources, from good research, or even just from good common sense to make up something that would look pretty close to a real interview. But that doesn't MAKE it a real interview.

The God the Qur'an talks about is the same. And Muslims do worship this one and only Creator God. The question is not whether Muslims and Christians have the same God [there is only one Creator after all], the question is if their book is FROM this God which it claims to be from. Without question: The Qur'an speaks ABOUT God, but is it FROM God?

The TOPIC is the same, but is the SOURCE the same? The many unresolvable contradictions would deny it.

Now, the reporter doesn't even to be dishonest. Let me change the story a bit to accomodate it more to the situation as I think it could have been.

Let us suppose the reporter wanted an interview with the President but then he meets somebody claiming to be the aide of the President. "The President is unavailable at this time, but I am authorised to give you any information you need", he says.

So, our reporter is glad to not have to go home with empty hands and interviews the aide who is more than willing to give a lot of information and much of it even without being asked for it.

The reporter is honestly convinced he heard the most authentic voice of the President available to him at this time. The problem is, as one finds out later, that the person posing as the Aide of the President was a fraud. And all the reporter wrote was made up by him.

The reporter was honest, but the source was false. And obviously again, the source which is false but interested to be taken for true will make sure that things do sound thoroughly authentic. If he would claim absolutely impossible things he would be discovered immediately.

The prime question is:

Is the Qur'an FROM God?

or equivalently

Is Muhammad a prophet sent by the one and only true God?

Even though I did bring up in this article the question "If not from God, what then is the source?" this is not a question of great interest to me. If I can establish that it is not from God, I do care very little by what dynamics and means it actually came into existence. Other human information? Thoughts from Muhammad's subconscious? Demonic influences? A mixture of those three? Yet another source? That is all quite unimportant. If it is not God, then I don't believe it and don't care much what else it is.

This posting was only to make clear that the God of the Qur'an and of the Bible can be the same and obviously are the same, yet nevertheless it can be true that one is true revelation while the other is not.

Muslims obviously will ask the same question about the Bible. Muslims do not believe that it is from God in the exact form as it is today [that is what corruption is all about]. Many Muslims even believe that many of the books in the Bible didn't belong in there in the first place. So, your accusation is just the same as my explanation above. You would concede that the Bible talks about the same God as the Qur'an, but that God is not the source of the Bible and hence it has to have some other source.

Given that this scenario is your accusation, I hope that you Muslim reader will not be too offended when Christians do have similar thoughts about the Qur'an. Actually, there is no other alternative. Even if we do not clearly speak it out all the time, the consequence can only be: If it is not from God, then it is a (clever) fraud of some sort and has to have another source, well-meaning, subjectively honest maybe, but the source is something else, and it is rather irrelevant what exactly it is.

To come back though to the original question: I believe that those who say Bible and Qur'an speak about a different God, confuse "topic" and "source" or "topic" and "content". Because the content (description) is different one might say it is a different understanding of God. To a certain extent this justifies to say that it is a "different God".

Hearing a different description of God by Christians and Muslims, some come to the conclusion you must be talking about different entities and that is understandable. Others come to the conclusion that the entity is the same [because there is only one Creator God - and both both agree that there is only one and hence they talk about this same one] but because of the differences one of them must have false information. At least SOME false information even though much of it is the same and probably true information.

If I say "This house is painted red all over" and another says "This house is painted green all over" then there are two possibilities: Either we are talking about two different houses [two different gods] or we are indeed pointing to the same house [god] but one of us is giving wrong information.

But since *all we know about God* comes to us through some kind of "information" [written or oral], if the information is different, our (understanding of) God is different. We do worship God according to what our understanding is of him. Subjectively different understandings are different gods. If I hear of a red house my imagination lets me "see" a red house. If I hear about a green house I "see" a green house within my mind independent of the real color of the house. The houses I "see" [think of] are actually different. So different information about God produces within our mind a different "gods" and we do worship God according to the "god" we know about. In that sense, our gods are different. [In that sense, the "imagined gods" of the Muslims among themselves and the "imagined gods" of Christians among themselves are different since everybody does have a somehow different understanding of God.]

I hope these thoughts help some of you to organize your thoughts on this rather important question [which I have been struggling with as well for quite a while]. Feedback is [welcome](#).

Obviously the next step has to be the investigation of the two "interviews" or "revelations" for clues whether they are indeed informed by the correct source or whether there are evidences why one of them is not from the true God it pretends to originate from.

The following links should be helpful in this quest for truth:

- ☐ [Allah: Is He God?](#)
 - ☐ [Who is God?](#)
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Another illustration might make even clearer the different ways people look at this question. Think about different artists painting a portrait of the same person. Some artists are realists who paint all the outward appearance detail for detail, another might be an intimate friend of the person he portraits and will use his knowledge of the character of his friend to paint a picture which is very much a true representation but more inspired by the inner reality than meticulous physical details. A third one is an abstract painter and not knowing the man at all he might put into this picture more about his own feelings and impressions in regard to this person than what the person really is.

The Bible speaks of Jesus as God's live self-portrait given to us:

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)

Who, being in the very nature of God, ... being made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:6-7)

He is the image of the invisible God, ... (Colossians 1:15)

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, ... (Hebrews 1:3)

The Biblical books then are "painted images" of God, of Jesus, of the prophets, ... by people like the second painter who paints a friend. Their deep experience and knowledge guided in addition by the Holy Spirit of God gives an accurate picture of the true character. For example, we learn much about the character of Christ in the Gospels but there is not one physical description of him.

My impression is that the Qur'an is an image of God like a portrait made by an abstract painter, a person who did not really know God intimately but puts into this picture much that he thinks God should be like. Since our human reason and philosophical thoughts about God are relatively similar in many ways, this picture will appeal to many people who recognize their own thoughts about God in this portrait. But it doesn't mean therefore that it is true. It would only mean that many people think similar about God and like to view him the same way.

And maybe the abstract painter has seen an old painting of the person which was damaged in many places, he had some true glimpses, but he had to fill in large parts by using his own imagination.

Similarly, Muhammad was not able to read the earlier scriptures for himself, but he had heard from the Jews and Christians a good number of stories. He had therefore some memory of the true image, he used those memories and supplied by himself the other pieces that were missing and not available to him. This hearsay accounts for a good number of similarities on the surface, but the fundamental differences come from not knowing this God by personal relationship as the Biblical writers did.

When we think about how something or somebody should look like (for example when reading a fiction book without pictures) our image of them is most often informed by our prior life experiences and might look very different from the image other people have when reading this same book and especially different from the image the author of the book had in mind when writing it. And that holds for biographies and history books as much as for fiction.

In this sense, even though the above painter intends to paint the real person, since he is doing so without true knowledge of this person he will paint something that he imagines it to be and this imagination is informed by the environment he grew up in and the world view that has made him the person he is.

I think this illustration is the correct one to understand the position of Dr. Morey and others who write books like "Allah the Moon god" (*). They seek in the society of Muhammad for clues about their images and understanding of God and then (for lack of true knowledge) this will be the source for Muhammad's teaching about God. Given the very idolatrous background of Arabia at the time of Muhammad, so the reasoning goes, Muhammad realizes that multiple gods cannot be true, but nevertheless in his attempt to get rid of all the minor gods/idols the image that Muhammad paints about (the only) God is informed by his upbringing including the understanding about the gods his society was used to, especially the highest of these idols, the moon god. Dr. Morey sees Muhammad as taking the highest of those gods and declaring him the only one and destroying the lesser ones, but retaining many of the characteristics of this highest of the idols.

I can understand the approach but I think it is not very helpful in the dialog and debates with Muslims. It is obviously not what Muslims believe. But he doesn't say Muslims believe this. He argues that this is the source but Muslims don't realize it.

In fact, Muslims do exactly the same thing, when they claim that the source of doctrines like "the incarnation", Jesus being "the son of God", "the Trinity" etc are all pagan concepts brought into the church when Christianity spread from the Jews to the Gentiles. Muslims charge the Christians that they took pagan concepts and "baptized them" just as Dr. Morey and others charge that Muhammad brought the character of the Arabic moon god into his preaching of monotheism.

As much as I think that this approach is unhelpful for dialog or even debate, I fail to see how the Muslims have a right to be outraged while they do the very same thing when looking at the Christian understanding of God.

The above is obviously my Christian understanding when looking at the situation. The Muslim might take this analogy and say, that Muhammad didn't paint at all but that he was handed a photograph exactly representing the heavenly original.

I might then again, accept that the preservation in great detail of the Qur'an could be likened to a photograph, but it is a photograph of the abstract painting above, an exact representation of an image that was not based on reality in the first place.

Certainly a very carefully hand copied painting of the real image will be nearer to the truth than a exact photograph of a painting that was never true. And it can be shown that both Qur'an and Bible have their textual variants, there is no complete preservation on both sides, yet both are very well preserved and we can be confident that the text we have today is essentially identical to the original manuscripts.

The fact that preservation says nothing about truth, and that there are books with false content which are meticulously preserved, and also knowing that both Bible and Qur'an can be shown to be well preserved, leads back again to the most important question:

How do we know that the book you believe in (Qur'an or the Bible) was originally from God and represents the true image?

IS ALLAH THE GOD OF BIBLE?

[Sam Shamoun](#)

This study examines the crucial question that needs to be addressed which is whether the God presented in the Quran is indeed the same God revealed in the Holy Bible. The Quran alleges that the God of Islam, Allah, is indeed the God of Abraham and hence the God of Scripture, Yahweh Elohim. But is this the case?

Are we to assume that just because the Quran states that Allah is Yahweh of the Bible that both Jews and Christians are obligated to believe this to be true? Or do we examine the nature and attributes of Allah in order to compare them with the biblical portrait of Yahweh to find if this is the case?

This process of examination is essential since our objective is to discover the true nature of God, a process whose outcome entails eternal consequences in regards to man's future destiny in the afterlife. After all, if Allah is the God of Abraham then Jews and Christians are wrong for not embracing Islam. But if Allah is not Yahweh, then Muslims are not worshiping the same God only with a different name.

We will examine certain qualities of Allah as stated in the Quran and briefly compare them to Yahweh and see where the evidence leads us. The reason why we are comparing Allah to Yahweh as opposed to contrasting Yahweh to the quranic portrait of Allah, using the Quran as the standard, is due to the fact that it is Islam that claims to worship the same God of the Holy Bible. Thus, the burden of proof rests upon the Muslims to defend this contention since they believe Allah is the same as Yahweh.

AUTHOR OF EVIL

The Holy Bible teaches that God cannot be tempted by evil and neither tempts anyone with evil; evil being understood as referring to immorality and sin. James 1:13 (c.f. Psalm 5:4-5; Habakkuk 1:13)

Yet, the Quran teaches that Allah is the author of evil:

Verily, the hypocrites *seek to deceive Allah, but it is He Who deceives them*. And when they stand up for As-Salat (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little. S. 4:142 Hilali-Khan

And (the unbelievers) *schemed* and planned, and Allah *schemed also, and the best of schemers is Allah*. S. 3:54

Are they then secure from *Allah's scheme (makra Allahi)*? None deemeth himself secure from *Allah's scheme (makra Allahi)* save folk that perish. S. 7:99 Pickthall

Remember how the unbelievers *schemed* against thee, to keep thee in bonds, or to slay thee, or get thee out (of thy home). They *scheme* and plot, *but the best of schemers is Allah*. S. 8:30

And when We make people taste of mercy after an affliction touches them, lo! *they devise schemes (makrun)* against Our communication. Say: *Allah is quicker to scheme (makran)*; surely Our apostles write down what you plan. S. 10:21

And those before them did indeed scheme (makara), *but all scheming (al-makru) is Allah's*; He knows what every soul earns, and the unbelievers shall come to know for whom is the (better) issue of the abode. S. 13:42

So they schemed a scheme: and We schemed a scheme, while they perceived not. S. 27:50

The term for scheme in Arabic is *makara* which denotes one who is a deceiver, one who is conniving, a schemer. It is always used in a negative sense. Allah is thus seen as the best of deceivers, the premiere schemer and conniving one.

This is not simply a Christian perspective but one thoroughly endorsed by Muslim theologians as well.

For example Dr. Mahmoud M. Ayoub in his book, *The Quran and Its Interpreters*, Vol. II *The House of Imran*, brings up the question of "how the word *makr* (scheming or plotting), *which implies deceitfulness or dishonesty*, could be attributed to God." (Ibid. [1992 State University of New York Press, Albany], p. 165)

After listing several Muslim sources he quotes ar-Razi as arguing that "scheming (*makr*) is **actually an act of deception aiming at causing evil**. It is not possible to attribute deception to God. Thus the word is one of the *muttashabihat* [multivalent words of the Quran]." (Ibid., p. 166)

Moreover, here is how one of the earliest sources on the life of Muhammad interpreted Q. 8:30:

Then he reminds the apostle of His favour towards him when the people plotted against him 'to kill him, or to wound him, or to drive him out; and they plotted and God plotted, and is the best of plotters.' i.e. I DECEIVED them with My firm GUILE so that I delivered you from them. (*The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah*, with introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume [Oxford University Press, Karachi, Tenth impression 1995], p. 323; capital emphasis ours)

In fact the Quran furnishes plenty of examples on some of the methods Allah adopts in devising evil:

Remember in thy dream Allah showed them as a few: **if he had showed them to thee as many, ye would surely have been discouraged, and ye would surely have disputed in your decision:** but Allah saved you: for He knoweth well the (secrets) of (all) hearts. S. 8:43

Allah is said to have shown the opposing fighting forces as few to Muhammad since if he had shown them as they actually were, the Muslims would have been afraid to fight. Hence, Allah had to use deception in order to encourage the Muslims to fight in his cause.

And when We desire to destroy a city, **We command its men who live at ease, and they commit ungodliness therein**, then the Word is realized against it, and We destroy it utterly. S. 17:16

Allah commands men to sin in order to destroy them completely.

They (*Jinns*- demon spirits) worked for him (Solomon) as he desired ... then when We decreed death upon him, nothing showed them his death except a little creeping creature of the earth, which gnawed away at his staff. And when he fell the Jinns saw clearly how, **if they had known the unseen, they would not have continued in the humiliating penalty (of work)**. S. 34:13-14

Allah deceived the Jinns into working for Solomon by preventing the latter's death from being disclosed to them, otherwise they would have stopped their work.

Allah also deceived both Christians and Jews into thinking that Jesus was crucified when in fact "it was so made to appear unto them", seeing that he never was crucified or killed. S. 4:157

According to S. 9:51, nothing befalls Muslims except what Allah has ordained. And in S. 14:4, we are told, "Allah leads astray whomsoever He will and guides whomsoever he will."

And,

"Whomsoever Allah guides, he is the one who follows the right way; and whomsoever He causes to err, these are the losers. **And certainly We have created for hell many of the jinn and the men;** ... Whomsoever Allah causes to err, there is no guide for him; and He leaves them alone in their inordinacy, blindly wandering on." S. 7:178-179, 186

"If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one People: but they will not cease to differ. Except those on whom thy Lord hath bestowed His Mercy: and for this did He create them: and the Word of thy Lord shall be fulfilled: 'I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together.'" S. 11:118-119

Not only does Allah guide people astray, but also has created men specifically for hell. To make matters worse, he even ordains the evil one commits as we have already seen in S. 17:16 and further clarified by this Muslim tradition:

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Apostle as saying:

Verily Allah has fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in, and which he of necessity must commit (or there would be no escape from it)." *Sahih Muslim* #6421, 6422

To even imagine that Allah causes adultery is not only horrendous but disqualifies him from being the God of Moses.

A keen reader might raise the objection that the Bible itself indicates in several places that God had intended to do evil to certain nations and individuals such as Absalom in 2 Samuel 17:14. Or that Jeremiah had been deceived by God in Jeremiah 20:7:

"O LORD, thou hast deceived me and I was deceived." King James Version

Firstly, in regards to 2 Sam. 17:14 as we had noted earlier God does not tempt anyone with moral evil in the form of sin but brings upon man calamity as a consequence of their sins. In fact, the term which the King James translates as evil is the Hebrew *ra*. Accordingly, some Hebrew scholars see it as being derived from the word *ra'a* which means to "break, smash, crush." (*Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testaments*, p. 232)

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible gives various meanings some of which include adversity, affliction, calamity, distress, evil, grief (#7451 of the Hebrew Dictionary Section).

Thus, the evil God poured out upon these individuals was not immorality like that of the Quran but judgement upon the wicked due to their persistence in sin and a refusal to come into repentance.

The Hebrew term for deceive used in Jeremiah 20:7 is *pathath*. Strong's lists it as #6601 in the Hebrew section with the following meanings; allure, enlarge, entice, deceive, flatter, persuade, silly. In light of the wide range of meanings, there is no reason to assume that Jeremiah meant that God was actually deceiving him.

In fact the context itself shows that the word can only mean "persuade" since Jeremiah is complaining that God is persuading him to continue his ministry, even though he doesn't want to:

"O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded;
YOU ARE STRONGER THAN I, AND HAVE PREVAILED.
I am in derision daily;
Everyone mocks me.
For when I spoke, I cried out;
I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!'
Because the word of the LORD was made to me
A reproach and a derision daily.
Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him,
Nor speak anymore in His name.'
But His word was in my heart like a burning fire
Shut up in my bones;
I was weary of holding it back,
And I could not." Jeremiah 20:8-9 NKJV

God was therefore insisting that Jeremiah continue and did so by constant persuasion. This passage has nothing to do with deception whatsoever.

Another possible objection would be the King James rendering of Ezekiel 20:25 where God says to Israel that he "gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgements whereby they should not live." This strongly suggests that God is the author of evil.

The context of the passage is referring to Israel's reluctance in observing God's holy commands, which prompted God to hand them over to their own desires (all of chapter 20).

Scripture clearly teaches that when God sees that a nation refuses to embrace the truth he has revealed, the Lord then hardens their hearts that they might continue in their wickedness. This is done that he might bring upon them the judgement that they deserve for their evil (c.f. Romans 1:18-32; 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12).

Therefore, God does not give them unholy commands but allows them to embrace statutes which are evil. This is the meaning of the Hebrew text as accurately reflected in the New King James Version:

"Therefore, *I also gave them up* to statutes that were not good, and judgements by which they could not live."

Yet, the Arabic *makara* does not allow for other possible meanings. And the Quran itself gives examples of Allah using deception and sin to fulfill his will.

AUTHOR OF ABROGATION

According to the Quran Allah reveals a verse only to have it canceled out a short time later:

None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten but We substitute something better or similar- Knowest thou not that Allah has power over all things? S. 2:106

When We substitute one revelation for another- and Allah knowest best what He reveals (in stages)- They say, "Thou art but a forger"; But most of them understand not. S. 16:101

This leaves us with the difficulty of having a God who does not remain consistent and often changes his revealed purpose. This being the case, how is one to know that the promises of such a Being in regards to eternal security can be trusted? Just as he changes his mind in relation to the revelation, he can also decide to change his mind in regards to the believer's ultimate destiny without anything stopping him from doing so.

This is different from Yahweh of the Holy Bible who does not change and as such can be totally trusted in fulfilling all his promises:

God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent. Has he said, and will he not do? Or has he spoken, and will he not make it good? Numbers 23:19

For I, Yahweh, do not change. Malachi 3:6

If we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2:13

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Hebrews 13:8

Because the God of the Bible is immutable he can promise, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will never pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

Two responses can possibly be presented and often are by Muslims. The first is the fact that abrogation is not referring to the Quran but to previous scriptures such as the Bible.

Unfortunately for the Muslims making this argument, this interpretation cannot be defended in light of S. 87:6-8:

By degrees shall We teach thee (Muhammad) to declare (the Message) so thou shalt not forget, *except as Allah Wills*: For He knoweth what is manifest and what is hidden. And We will make it easy for thee (to follow) the simple (Path).

It becomes obvious that certain parts of the revelation given to Muhammad will eventually be caused to be forgotten, since Allah later willed it.

The second response often presented is that the Bible clearly speaks of God regretting to create man or having repented of bringing on a certain disaster which he had planned to do. (c.f. Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14)

There are basically two responses for this assumed Muslim allegation. First, both the Holy Bible and the Quran use anthropomorphic language in describing both the nature and acts of God. For instance, both books speak of God's eyes, hands and feet without implying that these things are to be taken literally. The purpose of using such language is to communicate certain incomprehensible truths of God in human language in order for man to grasp certain realities of the divine nature. Hence, statements such as God having regrets is used to communicate

certain realities to man in relational terms, i.e. that God identifies with our human condition and grieves for man's fallen state, having compassion for him.

Secondly, the reason for indicating that God refrained from fulfilling an act he had decreed is an indication of his divine patience. God does not desire to destroy the wicked but to save them, desiring that they come into repentance:

Say to them: "As I live", says the Lord God, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?" Ezekiel 33:11

Likewise, if a nation which has been promised prosperity turns to wickedness, God will also refrain from fulfilling his promises of blessing. This is pointed out in Jeremiah 18:7-10:

"The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster I thought to bring upon it.

"And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and plant it, if it does evil in My sight, so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I would benefit it."

An example of this is seen in I Kings 21:29 where God had sworn to destroy Ahab for his wickedness, but decided against it:

"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? ***Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days.*** In the days of his son, I will bring the calamity on his house."

Or God deciding not to destroy Ninevah after seeing their sincere repentance and humbleness:

"Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He ***did not do it.***" Jonah 3:10

These examples indicate that certain warnings are given specifically to lead the person(s) into right standing with God, and are not given as a sign that the matter has been sealed and there is no averting the disaster.

AUTHOR OF HISTORICAL ERRORS

The Quran contains historical errors which implies that Allah is not an Omniscient Being, since an all-knowing Being would be able to accurately recall historical events. Below is a list of just some of the many problems we find in the Quran.

- In S. 17:1 we are told that Muhammad was taken to the farthest Mosque, *Masjid al-Aqsa*. The problem with this is that the Aqsa Mosque had not been erected since Abd al-Malik only built it in AD 691. It cannot be referring to the Temple in Jerusalem since that was destroyed by the armies of the Roman general Titus in AD 70.
- S. 18:9-26 alludes to several men and their dog who slept for approximately 309 years only to be awakened in perfect condition.
- According to S. 18:83-98, Alexander the Great called *Zhul Qarnain*, "*the Two Horned One*," was a Muslim who traveled till he found the Sun literally setting in a muddy spring. When we keep in mind that the title "*the Two Horned One*" was a title given to Alexander in pre-Islamic times, the Muslim attempts of trying to deny this fact utterly fails.
- According to S. 4:157 the unbelieving Jews boasted by saying, "We killed the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of Allah." The only problem with this is that the unbelieving Jews never admitted that

Jesus was Messiah and would not have killed him if they had believed that he was their long-awaited Messianic Deliverer. The unbelieving Jews had Jesus killed because they believed he was a false Messiah:

"And they began to accuse him, saying, 'We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar *and CLAIMS to be Christ* a king.'" Luke 23:2 NIV

- Christians are accused of worshipping Mary and Jesus as two gods apart from the true God:

And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, Worship me *and my mother* ..." S. 5:116

Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle- many were the apostles that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. *They had both to eat their (daily) food.* See how Allah doth make His Signs clear to them ... S. 5:75

In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary. Say: "Who then hath the least power against Allah, if His Will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, *his mother*, and all - every one that is on the earth..." S. 5:17

This presumes that since Mary ate food and could be destroyed by Allah she could not possibly be divine. This gives the misleading impression that Christians believe that she is more than simply human.

In fact, the Quran proceeds to accuse Christians of worshipping three gods:

"They do blaspheme who say: *Allah is the third of three (inallaaha thaalithu thalaatha)*" S. 5:73

"... so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not *three (thalaatha)*: desist: It will be better for you: *for Allah is one Allah* ..." S. 4:171

According to Muslim biographer Ibn Ishaq in his work, *Sirat Rasulullah*, a Christian deputation from Najran came to debate Muhammad on the person of Jesus. Accordingly, these Christians allegedly believed that Jesus, "is God; and He is the son of God; *and He is the third Person of the Trinity, which is the doctrine of Christianity.*" (Alfred Guillaume trans., *The Life of Muhammad* [Oxford University Press, Karachi], p. 271)

He goes on to say, "They argue that he is the third of three in that God says: We have done, We have commanded, We have created and We have decreed, and they say, If He were one He would have said I have done, I have created, and so on, but He is He and Jesus *and Mary.* *Concerning all these assertions the Quran came down.*" (Ibid., pp. 271-272)

The errors in the Quranic teaching on what Christians believe becomes apparent to anyone familiar with the basics of Christian doctrine. Firstly, Christians have never taken Mary as a goddess alongside God. Secondly, Christians have never said God is three or the third of three which is *tritheism*, *three separate gods* forming a unity; as opposed to Trinity, ONE *God* who exists in Three distinct *yet inseparable Persons*: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, Christianity has never taught as part of its doctrine that Jesus is the third Person of the Trinity. Rather, he is the *Second* Person, with the Holy Spirit being the third Person of the Godhead. Matthew 28:19

Fourthly, Muslims believe that Allah of the Quran is the same as God the Father of the Holy Bible since they do not believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ, nor in God the Holy Spirit who to Muslims is the angel Gabriel. This again causes a problem since if Allah is indeed the same Person as God the Father then the Quran is wrong in saying that Christians believe that the Father is the third of three. Christians teach that the Father is the *First* Person of the *One* True Godhead, not the third deity of three gods.

And finally, Christians do not believe that Allah is the Messiah, or that God is the Messiah since this implies that Jesus is the entire Godhead, which would be *modalism*. The correct and biblical statement is that Jesus is God,

since this suggests that although Jesus is fully God by nature he is not the only Person who shares the essence of Deity perfectly. The Bible also teaches that both the Father and the Holy Spirit are fully God.

- Mary the Mother of Jesus is confused with Mary the sister of Aaron and Moses, the daughter of Amram:

Behold! *The wife of Imran* (i.e. Amram) said, "O my Lord! I do dedicate unto thee what is in my womb"... When she was delivered, she said: "O my Lord! Behold! I am delivered of a female child ... *I have named her Mary...*" S. 3:35, 36

"And Mary the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity.." S. 66:12.

"... They said: O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! *O sister of Aaron!* Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste." S. 19:27-28

"Then Mary (*Heb. Mariam*), the prophetess, *the sister of Aaron*, took the timbrel in her hand ..." Exodus 15:20

"The name of *Amram's wife* was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and *their sister Miriam.*" Numbers 26:59

This is an error of nearly 1400 years! How could Moses' sister Mary be Jesus' mother, making Moses his uncle?

Muslims give two responses in trying to deal with this anachronism. First, it is stated that the expressions "sister of Aaron" and "daughter of Amram" refers to Mary's lineage, i.e. that Mary was a descendant of Aaron and Amram of the tribe of Levi. Unfortunately for Muslims, this assertion cannot possibly be the case since Mary was a daughter of Judah and a descendant of David:

"Now Jesus Himself began his ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed the son of Joseph, the son of Heli ... *the son of David ... the son of Judah.*" Luke 3:23, 31, 33

The words, "as was supposed," are given to clarify the fact that it is Mary's genealogy which is being presented, with Joseph acting as the male representative. This is supported by extrabiblical documents such as the Jewish tractate of the Talmud, *Chagigah*, where a certain person had a dream in which he saw the punishment of the damned. There, "He saw *Mary the daughter of Heli* amongst the shades." (John Lightfoot, *Commentary On the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* [Oxford University Press, 1859; with a second printing from Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1995], vol. 1, p. v; vol. 3, p.55)

In the book of Hebrews we are told that, "it is evident that our Lord (Jesus) *arose from Judah*, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" Heb. 7:14.

And,

"I (Jesus) am the Root *and Offspring of David*, the Bright Morning Star." Revelation 22:16

It is therefore impossible for Mary to be a descendant of Levi, since both the orthodox Jewish understanding and the biblical record agree that Messiah would arise out of Judah (c.f. Genesis 49:10-12; Matthew 22:42-45).

Someone might interject at this point and suggest that the Bible calls Elizabeth a relation of Mary:

"Now, indeed, Elizabeth *your relative* also conceived a son in her old age..." Luke 1:36 NKJV

This seems to imply that Mary is of Levitical descent, since Elizabeth is addressed as one of Aaron's descendants. (Cf. Luke 1:5)

The term used for relative in the Greek is *syngenes*. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich define it as:

a. " The adjective refers to a person of *common origin*, i.e., belonging to the same *family, race, tribe, or people*. It can then mean 'related' in disposition, 'corresponding', 'analogous', or 'similar.'

b. The noun means 'relationship' by *descent* or disposition, then more broadly 'analogy' (e.g. between deity and humanity, or ideas and the senses, or the stars and human destiny), whether in philosophy or popular belief." (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume by George W. Bromiley [Eerdmans, 1985], p. 1097)

Hence, Elizabeth and Mary were related in the sense of being of the same race of people, i.e. the Israelites. But this meaning seems to be unlikely since this could be said about any other Israelite woman's relationship to Mary. It seems more likely that Elizabeth and Mary were blood relatives. This being the case, this still wouldn't prove that Mary was of the tribe of Aaron. All this would prove is that Elizabeth had Judean blood in her, since Levites were allowed to marry women from any of the twelve tribes:

"The woman he (the Levitical Priests) marries must be a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from *his people*." Leviticus 21:13-14 NIV

Ezekiel, in his vision of a restored priesthood and temple, further clarifies this point:

"They shall not marry a widow or a divorced woman, **but only virgins of the offspring OF THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL**, or a widow who is the widow of a priest." Ezekiel 44:22 ESV

The Holy Bible even provides an example of a priest who had married a woman from Judea, who was actually a descendant of king David:

"Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal family of the house of Judah. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. **Thus Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahaziah**, hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not put him to death." 2 Chronicles 22:10-11

The foregoing demonstrates the plausibility of Elizabeth's mother being from the line of David, from the tribe of Judah, accounting for her being related to Mary.

Elizabeth could also be an aunt to Mary, see the [entry on Luke 1:36](#) in the Bible Commentary section.

Muslims are not to be blamed for taking the phrase "brother of" as a reference to Mary's lineage since Muhammad also used a similar line of reasoning to cover up this error. In *Sahih Muslim* Mughirah ibn Shu'bah narrates:

"When I came to Najran, they (the Christians of Najran) asked me: You read 'sister of Harun' (i.e., Mary), in the Quran, whereas Moses was born well before Jesus. When I came back to Allah's Messenger I asked him about that, and he said: 'The (people of old age) used to give names (to their persons) after the names of Apostles and pious persons who had gone before them.'" #5326

Again,

Ibn Abi Ahaybah and Ahmad and Abdel Hameed and Muslim and At-Tirmidhi and An-Nassaa'I and Ibn Al-Mundhir and Ibn Abi Haatim and Ibn Hibbaan and At-Tabaraani and Ibn Mardaweih and Al-Bayhaqi in *ad-dalaa'il*, narrated that Al-Mughirah Ibn Shu'bah said: "The Prophet of God (PBUH) sent me to the people of Najran. They asked me: Do you see what you read? O sister of Harun while Moses precedes Jesus with such a long time? He (Al-Mughirah) said: So I went back to the Prophet and mentioned that to him. He told me: "Would you tell them the folk used to be called after Prophets and pious people who preceded them?" (Jalaaluddeen As-Suyuti, *Ad-durr Al-Manthur*)

The only difficulty with Muhammad's statement is that the Jews before and during the time of Christ never used this phrase in this manner at all. Not one single reference from the Bible, either Old or New Testaments, the Jewish literature before the birth of Christ, or even the Jewish Talmud and Targums after Christ can be found to support Muhammad's assertion. This is simply a gross error which cannot be swept away.

The second argument is actually a clarification of the first in that it is suggested that both the Bible and the Quran furnish further evidence for the term "sister of" being used to imply ancestry:

"His (Zechariah) wife *was of the daughters of Aaron*, and her name was Elizabeth." Luke 1:5

It is obvious that the term "daughters" is speaking of Elizabeth's lineage and is not to be taken to literally mean that her father was actually Aaron the brother of Moses.

Again it is unfortunate for Muslims that this argument does not help them, but actually serves to weaken their argument. Although the Bible does use the phrases "*son of*," or "*daughter of*" to refer to ancestry, it never uses the terms "*brother of*" or "*sister of*" to indicate this fact. A few examples of the former usage include:

"So ought not this woman, being *a daughter of Abraham*, whom Satan has bound- think of it - for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" Luke 13:16

"And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is *a son of Abraham*.'" Luke 19:9

"And behold, two blind men sitting by the road, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, saying, 'Have mercy on us, O Lord, *Son of David*.'" Matthew 20:30

Scripture never addresses a person as a "brother of Abraham," or "sister of David" when wishing to imply lineage. Hence, the Muslim position cannot be defended biblically.

The second example is from the Quran where Salih is called Thamud's brother:

"We sent (aforetime) to the Thamud, *their brother Salih* ..." S. 27:45

The term brother here refers to kinsmen, not actual bloodbrothers, exemplifying the many different ways the term is used.

Once again the problem is far from being resolved since the term "brother" is used to address Salih's **contemporaries**, not his ancestors. This implies that to call Mary Aaron's sister meant that Mary and Aaron were contemporaries, living at the same time.

Unlike the Quran, the Holy Bible contains no historical errors. Most attacks on the Bible stem from arguments from silence, i.e. the fact that no independent archeological research has been discovered in support of certain recorded biblical events. Yet, such arguments only prove that as of yet archeology has failed to furnish evidence against an event reported in the Bible. Other attacks center on the precise dating of certain archeological findings which some see as contradicting the Holy Bible's chronology. Again, one cannot say that the Holy Bible is in error when archeologists themselves are divided over the precise dating of certain discoveries. This is especially so when one realizes that there are certain archeologists who provide evidence which they feel proves that the data corresponds perfectly with the Bible's chronology of the events in question.

This is far different from archeology providing evidence to show that certain events did not occur in the same manner in which the Bible says it did. In fact, not one archeological discovery has ever proven the Bible wrong; discovery after discovery has demonstrated the amazing historical accuracy of scripture. The following quotations from the world's leading archeologists affirms this fact:

"Nowhere has archeological discovery refuted the Bible as history." (John Elder, *Prophets, Idols and Diggers* [New York; Bobs Merrill, 1960], p. 16)

"Near Eastern archeology **has demonstrated the historical and geographical reliability of the Bible in many important areas**. By clarifying the objectivity and factual accuracy of biblical authors, archeology also helps correct the view that the Bible is avowedly partisan and subjective. It is now known, for instance, that, along with the Hittites, Hebrew scribes **were the best historians in the entire ancient Near East**, despite contrary propaganda that emerged from Assyria, Egypt, and elsewhere." (E. M. Blaiklock, editor's preface, *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archeology* [Grand Rapids, MI; Regency Reference Library/ Zondervan, 1983], pp. vii-viii)

The late William F. Albright, one of the world's foremost archeologists, stated:

"There can be no doubt that archeology **has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition**." (J. A. Thompson, *The Bible and Archeology* [Grand Rapids, MI; Eerdmans, 1975], p. 5)

Nelson Glueck, world renowned archeologist, concurs: "As a matter of fact, however, it maybe clearly stated categorically that no archeological discovery *has ever controverted a single biblical reference*. Scores of archeological findings have been made *which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible*." (Norman Geisler & Ron Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask; A Handbook on Christian Evidences* [Wheaton, IL; Victor, 1990], p. 179)

It should be noted that both Albright and Glueck were not conservative Christians and did not believe in the inspiration of scripture. Their conclusions were based strictly on the archeological data, forcing them to make the above admissions.

This cannot be said of the Quran with all of its historical and scientific mistakes.

AUTHOR OF CARNAL PLEASURES

The Quranic paradise is totally different from the biblical portrait of heaven. In Allah's paradise, we find sexual and carnal pleasures for believers to engage in throughout eternity:

But give glad tidings to those who believe and work righteousness, that their portions is Gardens, beneath which rivers flow, every time they are fed with fruits therefrom, they say: "Why, this is what we were fed with before," for they are giving things in similitude; And they have therein *damsels (Arabic - Houris)* pure (and holy); and they abide therein (forever)." S. 2:25

But to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath, their eternal home. Therein they have *damsels* pure and holy; We shall admit them to shades, cool and ever deepening. S. 4:57

Of a rare creation have We created the *Houris*, and We have made them *ever virgins*, dear to their spouses, of equal age with them for the people of the right hand. S. 56:35-38

But for those who fear Allah is a blissful abode, enclosed gardens and vineyards, *and damsels with swelling breasts (Arabic - Kawa'eb)*, their peers in age, and a full cup. S. 78:31-34 (Arberry and Rodwell translate this part correctly, see also [this overview page](#))

The orthodox Islamic understanding of these references are that Muslim men shall have a host of swelling breasted maidens to engage in sex with, who return to their virginal state after intercourse.

The paradise of Yahweh is one that is devoid of such carnality, being filled with the infinite love and joy of God instead. Hence, the believers' reward is to dwell with God forever in eternal glory:

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are counted worthy to attain that age and the resurrection from the dead, *neither marry nor are given in marriage*; nor can they die anymore for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.'" Luke 20:34-36

"The kingdom of God is not food or drink, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Romans 14:17

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain*, for the former things have passed away.'" Revelation 21:3-4

AUTHOR OF FOREIGN WORDS

The Quran claims to be in pure Arabic speech:

We have sent it down as an *Arabic* Quran, in order that ye may learn wisdom. S. 12:2

"An *Arabic* Quran, wherein there is no crookedness..." S. 9:28

And We know very well that they say, "Only a mortal is teaching him." The speech of him at whom they hint is barbarous- and this is *Arabic, pure and clear*. S. 16:103

But according to Arabic scholars the Quran is not in pure Arabic, containing dozens of foreign words:

Abariq, S. 56:18, Persian

Adam, S. 2:34, Akkadian

Araik, S. 18:31, Persian

Firdaus, S. 18:107, Pahlavi

Fir'awn, S. 73:15, Syriac

Habr, S. 9:31, Hebrew (*Haver*)

Istabraq, S. 18:31, Persian (*Istabar*)

Sakina, S. 2:248, Hebrew

Sijjil (baked clay), S. 105:4, Persian

Taghut (idols), S. 2:257, Syriac (*Teghutha*)

Zakat, S. 2:110, Syriac (*Zkhutha*)

Zanjabil (ginger), S. 76:17, Pahlavi

Muslims respond by presuming that all living languages adopt words from other cultures, and it is therefore not an error for the Quran to contain foreign words. This argument only works in regard to imperfect human beings who continually adopt and adapt to other cultures and customs.

Unfortunately for Muslims, this argument will not work for an all-powerful Being who is the Originator of human language. Such a Being is capable of inspiring his word in perfect Arabic completely devoid of foreign words, especially when he himself states that the Quran is in pure Arabic. This is even more so in light of the claim that the Quran is the eternal speech of God, i.e. that the Quran existed (on an *eternal tablet*) before the creation of human language. How can God's speech contain foreign words when these foreign languages did not exist in eternity? As one Muslim writer stated:

The Qur'an itself repeatedly asserts that it is a unique and inimitable "Arabic Qur'an" (12.2, 13.37, 16.103) in order to communicate its meaning in a perfect manner to a people who took great pride in the expressive quality of their language. **Much of the early discussion about the linguistic components of the Qur'an centred on the presence, or otherwise, of non-Arabic words in it - of course, based on the premise that it was essentially an Arabic text.** The verses referred to above became the key supportive texts for those who argued that the Qur'an did not contain any non-Arabic terms. The earliest exegetes, particularly those associated with 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas (d. 68/67-68), a cousin of Muhammad, freely discussed a large number of non-Arabic words in the Qur'an. Hadith literature credits Ibn 'Abbas and "his school" with having a special interest in seeking their origin and meaning. Later eminent scholars of the Qur'an such as the philologist/exegete Abu 'Ubayd (d. 838), however continued to argue that the Qur'an contained foreign words. Others such as Ibn 'Atiyyah (d. 541/1146), Suyuti (d. 911/1505), and 'Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'labi (d. 1468) tried to reconcile theology with linguistic principles. **They argued that the foreign words in the Qur'an came into Arabic through the ancient Arab's contacts with other languages in foreign travel and commerce but that they had been thoroughly Arabized by the time of the Prophet** [Sam- If this were so then there would have been

no need to highlight the fact that these foreign words had become part of the language since this would have been common knowledge to native Arab speakers like Ibn Abbas. That an explanation was needed to explain why foreign words appear in the Quran demonstrates how weak this Muslim claim actually is!] Various theories were evolved to resolve THE CONTRADICTION between the notion ascribed to Ibn 'Abbas and the one which subsequently gained greater acceptance, i.e., that the Qur'an does not contain any foreign terminology. To deal with the actual occurrence of words in the Arabic language that were also found in non-Arabic languages, some of these scholars, such as Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi (d. 204/819) and Tabari, developed the notion of tawafuq (coincidence). **They argued that both Arabic and other languages employ the same words with identical meanings and that this uniformity of meaning was purely coincidental.**

The idea of any language or discourse being absolutely free from expressions or words used in another language is alien to one of the most basic linguistic principles, i.e., the inter-relatedness of human speech. While this may sound trite, two factors, however, ensured that this notion was rejected by the "orthodoxy": **first, the Qur'an IS NOT REALLY REGARDED AS HUMAN SPEECH BUT RATHER GOD'S AND GOD'S SPEECH CANNOT BE SUBJECTED TO ANY LINGUISTIC PRINCIPLES.** Indeed, as is commonly known, Qur'anic Arabic became the standard of Arabic grammar. (The problem of God's speech of necessity having to coincide with human speech for effect and meaning remains.) Second, for the "orthodoxy", God's own eternalness and self-subsistence fused with those of His revelation. **The Qur'an and its language thus came to be viewed as equally timeless and independent of any "non-divine" elements, non-Arabic included.** The fact of God's revelation occurring in Arabic (or any other language for that matter) alongside the insistence that this is the unmediated medium which was used by God **raises an interesting question: If all comprehensible language and speech is the result of social interaction THEN DOES THIS IMPLY THAT GOD IS ALSO 'LIMITED' OR CONFINED TO THE LIMITATIONS OF LANGUAGE? If so, then WHAT DOES THIS IMPLY FOR THE ALL-POWERFUL NATURE OF GOD?** (Farid Esack, *The Qur'an - A Short Introduction* [Oneworld Publications, Oxford 2002], pp. 68-69; bold and capital emphasis mine)

AUTHOR OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS

Not only does the Quran contain foreign words, but according to Arabic grammarians it also contains grammatical mistakes:

The Qor'an contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully intelligible without the aid of commentaries; foreign words, unfamiliar Arabic words, and words used with other than the normal meaning, adjectives and verbs inflected without observance of the concords of gender and number- illogically and ungrammatically applied pronouns which sometimes have no referent- and predicates which in rhymed passages are often remote from the subjects ... To sum up, ***more than one hundred Qor'anic aberrations from the normal rules and structures have been noted...*** (Ali Dashti, *23 Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Muhammad* [Costa Mesa, Ca. 1994; Mazda Publishers], pp. 48, 50)

A few examples include the following passages:

- S. 7:56 - "The mercy of Allah is near"

Arabic - "inna rahmata Allahi qaribun min al-mohseneen."

The word *qaribun* is the predicate of *rahmata Allahi*, and as such should match in gender. Since *rahmata* is feminine the word *qaribun* (which is masculine) should be *qaribah*, its feminine form.

- S. 7:160 - "We divided them in twelve tribes"

Arabic - "wa qata'nahom 'ethnata 'ashrata asbatan."

In Arabic, any noun which is counted by a number above ten should be singular, as is the case in S. 7:142; 2:60; 5:12; 9:36; 12:4. As such the Arabic *asbatan* should be *sebtan*.

- S. 5:69 - "Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and *the Sabians*, and the Christians, whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, and works righteousness- no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow."

Arabic- "Innal-laziina 'aamanuu wal-laziina haaduu *was-Saabi'uuna* wan-Nasaara man'amaana bilaahi wal-Yawmil Aakhiri wa 'amila saali-hanfalaah khaw-fun 'alay-him wa laa hum yah-zanuun."

According to scholars, the Arabic *Saabi'uuna* has been wrongly declined. Compare the same grammatical structure found in the following suras:

S. 2:62- "Innal-laziina 'aamanuu wal-laziina haaduu wan-Nasaara *was-Saabi'iina*..."

S. 22:17- "Innal-laziina 'aamanuu wal-laziina haaduu *was-Saabi'iina* wan-Nasaara..."

In the last two suras the term was declined correctly, *Saabi'iina*, as opposed to *Saabi'uuna*. This is due to the word *inna* found in the beginning of the sentence causing a form of declension called "nasb" (as in the cases of accusative or subjunctive) with the "yeh" being the "sign of nasb". But the word *Saabi'uuna* is given the case of 'uu, a sign of "rafa" (as in cases of nominative and indicative). Accordingly, the verse in 5:69 is wrong.

- S. 91:5 - "By the heaven and that *which* built it."

Arabic- "was-samaaa-i wa *maa* ba-naahaa."

The word *ma* is impersonal in Arabic. Yet, the subject of the verse is Allah, heaven's Creator. As such the word *man*, meaning "*him who*", should have been used instead of the impersonal *ma*.

It should be pointed out that it is not only Arabic scholars who have discovered dozens of grammatical mistakes within the Quran, but Muhammad's very own companions in the past have also admitted this fact. The Muslim scholar Ibn al-Khatib in his book *al Furqan* quotes Muhammad's wife Aisha as saying:

"There are three grammatical errors in the Book of Allah, they are the fault of the scribe: In 20:63 ... And in 5:69 ... And in 4:162." (Muhammad M. abd al-Latif Ibn al-Khatib, *Al-Furqan* [Dar al-Kutub al-Elmiyah, Beirut], p. 91)

After seeing the first standard copy of the Quran, Islam's third Caliph Uthman proclaimed, "*I see grammatical errors in it*, and the Arabs will read it correctly with their tongues." (Ibid., p.90)

For the Quran to be the word of Allah and for Allah to be God one should find no grammatical mistakes, especially since Muslims claim that the Quran contains no human element whatsoever. Muslim view is that the Quran was dictated word for word to Muhammad, which implies that Allah is the Author of these grammatical errors. This disqualifies Allah from being God, especially Yahweh God of the Holy Bible.

To avoid this problem, Muslims assert that the Quran was revealed in a style called *balaagha*, which is an eloquent method of expressing the Arabic. Due to this feature, the Quran is not required to be grammatically correct since its aim is at eloquence.

Once again this assumption serves to undermine the Muslim position. It may be true that a document written by man cannot be both grammatically correct and still retain an optimum level of eloquence, since a human writer most often sacrifices one literary feature over the other. But this cannot be said of God since he can easily produce a book which contains both perfect grammar and eloquence without ever sacrificing one for the other. This the Quran fails to do.

ALLAH AND OATHS

A real point of difference between Allah and Yahweh is that Yahweh swears by himself, since there is nothing greater for him to swear by:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself. Hebrews 6:13

For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Hebrews 6:16

Hence, every time God makes a pledge he swears only by himself to insure believers that he will do all that he promises:

"I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow..." Isaiah 45:23

"I swear by Myself, says the LORD." Jeremiah 22:5

Yet, Allah swears by things less than him:

Swears by the Quran

By the Quran, full of wisdom. S. 36:2

By the Quran, full of admonition. S. 38:1

Swears by the sky and constellations

By the sky and the night visitant S. 86:1

Nay verily: *By the moon*, and *by the night* as it retreateth, and *by the dawn* as it shines forth. S. 74:32-34

By the star when it goes down. S. 53:1

Swears by the pen

By the pen and *by the record* which [men] write. S. 68:1

Swears by the city

Nay I do swear *by this city*. S. 90:1

Swears by the Creation

By the night as it cancels [the light]; *by the day* as it appears in glory; *by the Creation of male and female*. S. 92:1-3

The fact that Allah swears by practically anything and everything, while Yahweh swears only by himself, makes it very difficult for the two to be the one and the same God.

ALLAH IS NOT TRIUNE

The final proof that Allah is not Yahweh Elohim of the Holy Bible is that Allah is not a trinity. According to the Holy Bible, there is only One true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Galatians 3:20).

Yet, at the same time Scripture affirms that this One God eternally exists in three Persons:

The Father

"...elect according to the foreknowledge of God *the Father*..." 1 Peter 1:2

The Son

"... looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of our *Great God and Savior Jesus Christ*..." Titus 2:13

The Holy Spirit

"But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart *to lie to the Holy Spirit... you have not lied to men but to God*.'" Acts 5:3-4

Three in One

"... baptizing them in the *Name* (singular - implying unity) of *the Father*, and of *the Son*, and of *the Holy Spirit* ..." Matthew 28:19

But the Allah of the Quran is not any of the three Persons mentioned above. For example S. 112 states,

Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, The Eternal, Absolute-, *He begetteth not, Nor is He Begotten*; And there is none like unto Him. S. 112: 1-4

Allah does not "beget" meaning that Allah has no children either in a spiritual or carnal sense. Thus, Allah can never be the Father. Nor does he allow himself to be "begotten", i.e. does not take on human nature such as God the Son did when he became man for our salvation. Finally, in orthodox Islam the Holy Spirit is not God, but the angel Gabriel. This fact separates Allah from ever possibly being the same God that Christians worship.

Furthermore, we read in I John 2:22-23:

"Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? *He is Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son*. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also."

Thus, to the Christians Allah cannot be the biblical God since the inspired New Testament record teaches that anyone denying the Father and Son as God is Antichrist.

One common Muslim allegation needs to be briefly addressed before concluding. In Exodus 31:17 it says that after Yahweh created the universe, he rested on the Sabbath and was refreshed. This description is not befitting God since he never fatigues nor does he need to be refreshed.

In response to this, as we have already noted scripture often uses anthropomorphic language in describing God's relations with man. The context of this passage deals with the necessity of Sabbath observance as a sign between God and Israel, and as such God is speaking to his covenant people in relational terms.

Just as God rested on the seventh day, it is important for Israel to do likewise especially in light of the fact that they are the chosen people of God and must imitate him by observing all his commands.

Furthermore, the term for Sabbath in Hebrew is *shabat*. It is listed in Strong's as #7673 with the following meanings: to stop, to cease, to rest, to end. Also, the term "refreshed" doesn't necessarily mean that God needed to take a breather after creating the universe anymore than the expression "my heart was refreshed" implies fatigue. Rather, it refers to God rejoicing over the goodness of his creation.

Thus, these terms do not imply that God literally needed to rest and be refreshed. It simply means that after the formation of man God stopped his work of creation and rejoiced at the fact that all creation up to that point was very good. (c.f. Genesis 1:31)

This interpretation is consistent with the clear teaching of Scripture that God never fatigues:

"He will not allow your foot to be moved- He who keeps you *will not slumber*. Behold, He who keeps Israel *shall neither slumber nor sleep*." Psalm 121: 3-4

"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, *neither faints nor is weary*. His understanding is unsearchable." Isaiah 40:28

To then try and use Exodus 31:17 as a prooftext while neglecting the overall context of scripture is rather poor exegesis and unscholarly, since the Bible is clear that God has inexhaustible power and energy.

Our brief examination of Allah as presented in the Quran leads us to conclude that he cannot possibly be the same God worshiped by Abraham and as described in the Holy Bible. The contradictions in attributes and nature between Yahweh and Allah are too numerous to pass over, and cannot be reconciled.

With that in mind, we must point out another major difference between the two; namely that the God of the Holy Bible gives an assurance of salvation through Jesus Christ the Lord, something which Allah never guarantees:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish,

but have everlasting life. John 3:16

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me *has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life.* John 5:24

And if anyone hears my words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world *but to save the world.* John 12:47

The Bible clearly teaches that there is no other way for man to be saved, since Jesus alone can guarantee eternal life, something which the Quran cannot promise any Muslim:

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man comes to the Father *except through me.*'" John 14:6

"Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12

The reason why Christ alone can promise salvation is because he alone paid the penalty for sin which is death. By his death on the cross Christ provided the only acceptable sacrifice to God on behalf of sinners:

"Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as *a propitiation*) a sacrifice offered which satisfies the divine justice of God) in his blood ..." Romans 3:24-25

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 6:23

It is therefore up to Muslims to decide whether to accept Jesus Christ as Yahweh's Son and the Savior of the world and receive the assurance of eternal salvation. Or continue to worship Allah of the Quran who never promises Muslims the joy of knowing that their sins have been forgiven, giving them the assurance of eternal salvation. The choice is left for the reader to decide.

NOTE TO THE READER

We are well aware that the name **Allah** is used by Arab speaking Christians for the God of the Bible. In fact, the root from which the name is derived, *ilah*, stems from the ancient Semitic languages, corresponding to the Mesopotamian **IL**, as well as the Hebrew-Aramaic **EL**, as in Ishma-*el*, Immanu-*el*, Isra-*el*. These terms were often used to refer to any deity worshiped as a high god, especially the chief deity amongst a pantheon of lesser gods. As such, the Holy Bible uses the term as just one of the many titles for Yahweh, the only true God.

Yet the problem arises from the fact that Muslims insist that Allah is not a title, but the personal name of the God of Islam. This becomes problematic since according to the Holy Bible the name of the God of Abraham is Yahweh/Jehovah, not Allah:

God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am Yahweh (YHVH) and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty; **BUT BY MY NAME, YAHWEH**, I did not make myself known to them." Exodus 6:2-3

Therefore, Christians can use Allah as a title or a generic noun for the true God, but not as the personal name for the God of the Holy Bible.

Do Muslims and Christians speak the same language?

J.M.

The first time I heard it I was a bit stunned. My friend, Blama (a West African form of the name Ibrahima) held out his hands, face down. He extended both index fingers straight out, held them firmly pressed together side-by-side and stated, "The Muslim and the Christian are like this. No difference." Here I had been trying to convince him that the two religions were very different and now he was telling me that we were the same. I was doing my

best to point out the dissimilarities between our Scriptures, our God, our prophets and how we ought to live. Apparently, Blama saw things differently than I!

The purpose of this writing is to explore Islam and Christianity, but with the underlying premise that words used by both are not the same. It is the hope that by the final word, the reader will begin to grasp the tremendous complexity of the words of both religions and that the reader will not blithely use words which are not communicating the truth of the gospel of 'Isa Al-Masih.

Words Have Meaning

The premise is quite simple. Words have meaning. The words being written for the reader to peruse are really nothing more than vehicles for meaning. Physical symbols of 'g', 'o', and 'd', when properly combined produce visual representations of meaning.

I am sure we can all agree that words have meaning. When we use a word, we do so because we have agreed between us that it has a specific meaning. For instance, if one wishes to communicate 'plate', the word 'frivolous' is not used. Likewise, if one desires to communicate a more transcendent idea, such as the hope one has for success, one does not employ this phrase: "I really like your dress, Francine!"

To complicate such a simple notion, however, we can add the subject of comparative religion to the mix. Do not all religions speak about God, sin, good and evil? Because a Muslim and Christian use the same words, we must mean the same thing, correct? After all, we both believe that 'God' is one, the creator, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and totally unlike anything other being. We both agree that humans sin, that sin is bad because it is an act of rebellion against God. So, what is the problem?

Let me illustrate with a somewhat crude analogy. Sitting out in your front yard is a Ford and a Fiat. Let us make a list of similarities between the two:

- both are automobiles used for transportation;
- both words begin with 'F' and have four letters;
- both use petroleum products;
- both might even be the same color.

If we simply employ the similarities of the objects, we could rightly say that it would appear the Ford and Fiat are the same. Perhaps we would focus on the one underlying characteristic of both: they are automobiles whose purpose is transportation. Surely, these similarities are overriding in our understanding of the Ford and Fiat? Not only are they similar in important ways, they are categorically the same! They are automobiles. Granted, a Ford salesman might tell you a Fiat is not an automobile, but who can trust a car salesman?!

But the question remains: Is a Ford the same as or similar to a Fiat? Are there differences?

- one is American made, the other Italian;
- one is automatic, the other has a stick shift;
- one is new, the other is old;
- one has four doors, the other two.

Sameness and Similarity

Based on these observations, is the Ford similar to or equivalent to the Fiat? If one uses only the first list, the list of comparison, the two cars can almost be made to be equivalent (the same). On the other hand, if the second

list, the contrasting characteristics, is used in addition to the first, the only conclusion possible is that the two cars are simply similar. That is, they share commonalities and similarities, but they are not the same or equivalent.

For clarity, let us distinguish between the idea of 'sameness' and 'similarity'. First, let me offer this stipulative definition for sameness: any two items, persons or ideas are equivalent in every characteristic and attribute. Philosophically we are speaking of strict identity. An underlying assumption which feeds into this notion of sameness is that change exists. Sameness allows for no change or alteration. For purposes of this discussion, Muslims and Christians agree that very little changes. In fact, we might agree that God is the only being not subject to change. But this refers to his character and attributes, not to our understanding of God. More on this later.

Similarity is not sameness. Similarity is a flexible, fluctuating, pliable concept. Sameness is firm, unbreakable, absolute. Two things, persons or ideas may share any number of similarities. That they are partners in similarity, by definition, makes them not the same. Sameness and similarity are mutually exclusive concepts.

The Ford and the Fiat are similar. The fact of their similarity proves they cannot be the same. If the Ford and Fiat were indeed the very same car (but perhaps called different names by various people), we could not say they are similar. I am reminded of my own children and their struggles with the English language. Many times one of them will say something such as "That place is like a store." What is being described is a store. If it is like (similar to) a store, it cannot be a store. It might be an office building, a house, a bank or a garage, but it cannot be a store. So, I gently correct the statement, "It cannot be like a store if it is a store." Six year olds do not yet understand the formal equivalence of 'is'.

Second, the definition of similar: two or more items, persons or ideas which may have at least one characteristic held in common. Obviously, then, the greater the number of characteristics and attributes held in common, the greater the similarity. The characteristics of commonality may be endless, but if there is one characteristic which is not equivalent, the two cannot be called the same.

Similarity works on a sliding scale of contrasting and comparing. We can say 'x' is very much like 'y' or we may say 'z' is very little like 'y'. Both statements deal with similarity. Sameness is identity. There is no sliding scale of comparison. Either the items, persons or ideas are equal, equivalent, and identical or they are not.

It would appear that many times, Muslims (and Christians) have committed this type of error. This error is known as the fallacy of equivocation (equating two or more concepts which are not the same though they may be similar). Words which have similar meanings (that is, they share commonalities) are made to be equivalent. Muslims say 'car' meaning Ford while Christians think Fiat! Muslims say 'Allah' and think this is the God of the Bible.

Do Muslims Words Have Christian Meanings?

It is assumed the reader is Christian (though I am sure there are Muslims who will also find this). For this reason, it is assumed the reader has a Christian understanding of God, his attributes, his character and his revelation. Therefore, we will not attempt to define or list the characteristics of Yahweh, but only the character and attributes of Allah will be investigated. Let the reader decide if the words mean the same or are only similar. If the words are similar, what is the degree of similarity?

Allah

1)

The case for sameness

Muslims and Christians agree that the Almighty is One. There is agreement that he is the creator of all things. He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Without listing the 99 names of Allah, it is generally held by Christians that most of these names can find their counterparts in the Bible. While there is much we know about Allah, there is a greater storehouse of knowledge we do not know. The Almighty is totally other, yet is said to be nearer than a man's jugular vein (Qur'an 50:16).

Allah reveals his will to mankind in a book given through prophets. He calls for obedience to his will. He punishes evil and rewards good. He forgives, shows mercy and compassion, yet he displays his anger and wrath as well.

Allah is self-existent, to be worshiped, hears and answers prayers, sustains the universe, free of all wants and needs, irresistible, the light of the heavens, Lord of the dawn, et al.

What Christian could object to these qualities also existing in the Yahweh? In fact, both Allah and Yahweh are categorically identical: the One, true, Creator, Sustaining Almighty God who rules the universe. The question remains: Are they similar or identical?

2)

The case for similarity

Ask a Muslim if the Almighty would deign to become a human being.⁽¹⁾

Ask if the Almighty can be known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁽²⁾

Ask if the Qur'an reveals the Almighty's character or only his will.⁽³⁾

Ask if the Almighty can allow people to lie in certain circumstances.⁽⁴⁾

Ask if the Almighty has compassion on those going to hell.⁽⁵⁾

Ask if the Almighty has a knowable essence.⁽⁶⁾

Conclusion

It is hoped the reader has begun to grapple with the complexity of the situation. The Muslim-Christian debate can only benefit as both sides think, speak and write clearly. Our words must accurately reflect the understanding derived from our own Scriptures. Words do have meaning and therefore, they must be used appropriately. In the Muslim-Christian debate there are certain words (viz., 'God', 'Allah' and 'Yahweh') which share commonalities. Too often, in a naive attempt to foster dialogue, we make these commonalities the pinnacle of our discussion. The words used by Muslim and Christian do not necessarily have the same meaning. When it is stated that Allah = Yahweh = Brahman = Allah, this is more than oversight. It shows a lack of understanding of the meaning or content of the words.

There are words and concepts which bear scrutiny with which this paper has not dealt. I have only presented a sketchy beginning for this process. It is hoped this introduction will prompt others to examine words, how they are used in Islam and Christianity, and the meanings behind those words.⁽⁷⁾ Never let it be said "We are arguing semantics." This is a 'poor man's argument' which is generally used as a smokescreen or red herring to draw attention away from the fact of the matter: semantics, meaning and words are important.

It behooves us to use words carefully and thoughtfully. We must not be guilty of assuming that when the Muslim says Allah he is speaking of Divinity with all the characteristics, attributes and essence of Yahweh. To do so is to be guilty of the fallacy of equivocation. We do not want equivocation to become our avocation.

End Notes

1. Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 291: "To conceive of God in Christ is for the Muslim mind an unworthy thing. God does not become man. If He did, something unthinkable would have happened to His Divinity. Muslims have resisted the Christian interpretation of Christ on these grounds in the belief that they are safeguarding the Divine majesty."

The Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, *The Ideal Prophet*, pp. 5, 6: "Where then arises the necessity of having a God-in-man placed before us as our ideal? The whole scheme, if any, would seem irrelevant."

2. Qur'an 4:171: (Far exalted is He) above having a son.

3. Cragg, p. 47: "The revelation [in the Qur'an] is conceived of, not as a communication of the Divine Being, but only of the Divine will. It is a revelation, that is, of law, not personality. God the revealer remains Himself unrevealed.

Fazlur Rahman, Islam, p. 37: "The Qur'an is primarily a book of religious and moral principles and exhortations ..."

4. Mishkat ul-Masabih, translated by Karim, vol. i, p. 467: "Asma'a-bn-Yezid reported that the Messenger of Allah said: Falsehood is not lawful except in three (things): falsehood of a man to his wife to please her, falsehood in war, and falsehood in restoring peace among men. - Ahmad and Tirmidhi"
5. Mishkat, v. iii, p. 117: "Abu Darda reported that the Holy Prophet said: Allah created Adam when he created him (sic). Then He stroke (sic) his right shoulder and took out a white race as if they were seeds, and He stroke (sic) his left shoulder and took out a black race as if they were coals. Then He said to those who were in his right side: Towards paradise and I don't care. He said to those who were on his left shoulder: Towards Hell and I don't care. - Ahmad"

This hadith seems racist in its report of creation. All Muslims know that the right hand is the hand for eating and greeting. The left is for 'other' matters. The right shoulder of Adam saw the white folks emerge. The black folks came from his left. The white race is called 'seeds'. Seeds grow and produce. The black race is compared to coals which are used to produce heat by burning. This is juxtaposed to those going to heaven and hell where they will either flourish or burn. It is difficult to resist the impression that Allah appears to be a racist.

6. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam, p. 18: "... the Divine essence (al-dhat) remains absolutely transcendent and no religion has emphasized the transcendent aspect of God more than Islam."

Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb, Answering Islam, p. 136: "... [in] traditional Islam, properly speaking, God does not have an essence, at least not a knowable one. Rather, he is Will. ... The orthodox Islamic view of God claims ... that God is an absolutely necessary being. He is self-existent, and he cannot not exist. But if God is by nature a necessary kind of being, then it is of his nature to exist. In short, he must have a nature or else he could not be by nature a necessary kind of being. In this same regard, orthodox Islam believes that there are other essential attributes of God, such as self-existence, uncreatedness, and eternity. But if these are all essential characteristics of God, then God must have an essence, otherwise they would not be essential attributes. For this is precisely how essence is defined, namely, as the essential attributes or characteristics of a being."

7. The following is an abbreviated list of suggested words: Jesus, Messiah, Lord, sin, forgiveness, righteousness, inspiration, and revelation.

Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God?

[Roland Clarke](#)

A generation ago many people in the west (including some Christians) wondered if, perhaps, followers of other faiths were worshipping the same God as Christians. Usually this question was prompted by looking at the many different religions around the world. Today, however, Christians are hearing this same question and often we're hearing it directly from Muslim neighbors or work mates – who've recently emigrated to the west in large numbers and now comprise the largest non-Christian faith. It is not uncommon to hear a friendly Muslim remark to his Christian neighbor, "You are not so different from us ... we worship the same God as you". In this day and age dominated by religious pluralism and tolerance towards other cultures, Christians are increasingly perplexed by the question, *Do Muslims worship the same God as Christians?*

If one focuses only on certain similarities, it might be easy to agree, especially when you consider that Muslims believe – as Christians do – in one God who created the universe. Not only so, the word for God in the Arabic Bible is Allah – the very same term Muslims use. The question of whether Christians and Muslims worship one and the same God will continue being asked, and increasingly so, as the number of Muslims keeps growing in the west, and indeed, globally.

Let me clarify that our intention is not to argue against using the terms God or Allah in a generic sense, as if to imply that we should undertake a new translation of the Arabic Bible. Our aim is simply to discuss the core character qualities of God. 'Oneness' is a primary attribute of God but aren't there other key characteristics that distinguish God from all other so-called gods – traits that prove he is greater? These are the kinds of questions we want to consider.

Now that we have properly understood the question, the reader wants to know, “How should I, as a Christian, respond to my neighbor?” Should I immediately try to expose those aspects of Islam which I know to be false? Should I begin by pointing out the stark differences between our two faiths? For example, the Qur'an – strictly speaking – denies that God is Father. Muslims emphatically reject Jesus as God's Son and they firmly deny Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection – the very heart of the gospel.

If we begin discussing such topics with a Muslim it will probably provoke an argument. The alternative is to start talking about common beliefs, such as the oneness of God. This approach is wiser (generally speaking). Not only is it consistent with the gracious example we see in Christ's life (especially with ordinary people), it is also in keeping with the teaching of the apostles. (John 4; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22; 1 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 2:22-26)

If our aim is to speak the truth in **love** – as the Bible instructs us to – we will want to use a gentle approach. We can respond warmly to our Muslim friend's comment about Muslims and Christians worshiping the same God. We can give him 'the benefit of the doubt', so to speak. Of course, it is entirely possible that our friend might discover – on closer examination – that the evidence points to a different answer.

We might say, “I believe in one God, as it is written in the first commandment, '*You must not have any other god but me.*'” (Exodus 20:3) By taking this approach we set the Muslim at ease because this belief is the cornerstone of his faith. In fact, most Muslims acknowledge that this commandment was the very first commandment (of 10) which Allah revealed through the prophet Moosa (Moses).

It is important not to just tell our friend the short version of this command. We should read the full statement as recorded in Exodus 20:2-3, “*I am the LORD your God who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me.*” The Exodus story, as recounted in the Qur'an, corresponds to the Biblical account – in most respects – although the Muslim version omits the 10th plague and Passover Lamb. The fact is: Muslims know the broad outline of this epic rescue story, including the climactic rescue when God parted the waters of the Red Sea. Muslims, therefore, are inclined to agree with the first commandment as found in Exodus 20:2-3.

It would appear – on the surface – that Muslims recognize Allah exerted awesome saving power on behalf of the helpless Israelites who faced an overwhelming Egyptian army! Unfortunately for most Muslims, this amazing deliverance is something they take for granted. True, they agree that Allah was 'mighty to save' but they overlook its significance because they don't include the name Savior on the prominent list of 99 names of Allah (nor are close synonyms such as Deliverer and Redeemer mentioned in this list).

The Bible, on the other hand, repeatedly emphasizes God's saving power, showing how it serves as a criterion for distinguishing the true God from other so-called gods. This is clear from the report Moses gave to his father-in-law Jethro, a Midianite priest. We read that Moses told him,

everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians on behalf of Israel. He also told about all the hardships they had experienced along the way and how the LORD had rescued his people from all their troubles. Jethro was delighted when he heard about all the good things the LORD had done for Israel as he

rescued them from the hand of the Egyptians. "Praise be to the Lord," Jethro said, "for he has rescued you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh ... I know now that God is greater than all other gods." (Exodus 18:8-11)

How do Muslims respond when they hear this amazing story? They agree that Moses' God must be greater than all other gods. The logic is simple and straightforward. But we should not assume that this one story is enough. The truth that God is 'mighty to save' needs to be reinforced by reading the [stories of other prophets](#).

A good example is the prophet Hosea who came hundreds of years after Moses. The Israelites were forgetful so the prophets had to remind them to worship God alone. We read in Hosea 13:4, *"But I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge **no God but me**, no Savior except me."* (bold font added for emphasis)

Most Muslims agree that Hosea 13:4 echoes the first commandment, but the last part of the declaration that says there is "no Savior except me" is unfamiliar to Muslims – to put it mildly. There are some Muslims who do not think this name is valid in our day, and there are a few who object strongly to using it. A Christian who understands this will be forbearing and patient. He knows the wisdom of gradually *"unfolding your words [so that it enlightens and] gives understanding to the simple."* (Psalm 119:130, NIV, see also 2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Space does not permit us to explain why Muslims respond so differently to the Divine name Savior (or with such ambivalence). Nevertheless, it is interesting that these reactions remind us of the question that started this whole discussion: *"Do Muslims and Christians worship the same God?"*

Of course there are some Muslims who anticipate where this topic is going and jump to conclusions. In a [few cases](#), they even prejudge the answer to the question. However, we will assume – for the sake of our discussion – that the Muslim friend we are talking with continues to give us the green light. The dialog continues with both parties showing mutual respect and a teachable attitude.

Jonah is a prophet who Muslims acknowledge was rescued by God from a near-death experience. As the story unfolds, the sailors were the first ones to narrowly miss being drowned. You recall that they desperately prayed to their idols while the storm raged around them. But their idols could not save them. However, they finally did as Jonah instructed and the raging sea suddenly stopped. Their lives were spared, *"they were awestruck by the LORD'S great power and they offered him a sacrifice and vowed to serve him."* (Jonah 1:16)

Jonah barely survived the fury of a killer storm, and then he experienced something frightfully close to death – being swallowed by a gigantic sea monster. However, he was miraculously rescued by God. From inside the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed, *"But you, O Lord God, snatched me from the jaws of death! ... Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise ... For my salvation comes from the Lord alone."* (Jonah 2:6-9)

There is a story that isn't told in the Qur'an but it makes fascinating reading for a Muslim – the story of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego. They defied the King's command to bow down to an idol. Every Muslim would agree this is a brave and noble act. They faced the threat of punishment from King Nebuchadnezzar for disobeying his orders. The punishment would be certain death in a fiery furnace. They were willing to die rather than deny God – a very admirable and heroic act (especially in the eyes of Muslims). God miraculously saved them which amazed Nebuchadnezzar so much that he ordered everyone in his kingdom, *"I make this decree, 'If any people, whatever their race or nation or language speak a word against the God of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb... There is no other god who can rescue like this.'"* (Daniel 3:29)

All these stories show that God is 'mighty to save'. Not only so, in each story idol worshipers are confronted with the one true God who alone is worthy of worship. Each story reinforces what we learned from Jethro – that God's saving power distinguishes him as utterly unique from (and greater than) idols. As we discuss these stories with our friends we should be much in prayer that God's Spirit will awaken in them, a deepening hunger, to read the Bible for themselves.

Now let us reflect once again on the Exodus story. This time, however, we will pay special attention to its world-wide implications. Notice how God said to Pharaoh, *"I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."* (Exodus 9:16, NIV) Pharaoh hardened his heart as a series of confrontations unfolded between Moses and Pharaoh. Pharaoh kept on hardening his heart and the plagues became more and more severe. Finally God struck Pharaoh and his people with a plague that was worse than any disaster Egypt had suffered or would ever suffer in the future! (Exodus 11:6) The magnitude of the catastrophe was so great that it reverberated around the world and its repercussions have been felt until today. The epic Exodus story has echoed down through the centuries, having been popularized 60 years ago in the block buster movie, *The Ten Commandments*.

Long after most movies have been forgotten, this movie has continued being sold; in fact, just a few years ago it was digitalized. And, of course, today the Exodus story has become even more widely known since Steven Spielberg produced his animated movie, *The Prince of Egypt*. Like *The Ten Commandments*, this movie was circulated world-wide, in fact it was dubbed into 17 languages! Think about it and you'll realize that this epic story appeals not just to Muslims but also to people of other faiths, such as Sikhs, Jains, New Agers and even Hindus! There are limitless possibilities for sharing the Exodus story with followers of other religions.

It is significant that these movies have helped spread the fame of Israel's God – the One who gave the 10 commandments through Moses. Although many Muslims would agree that the LORD gained world-wide fame and honor by overpowering Pharaoh and his idols, some might prefer to say that the title Savior had a peculiar relevance only to the Jewish people. After all, it was the Israelites who God rescued, so naturally they should honor him as Savior. Whether or not **other nations** acknowledge him as Savior is another matter.

If Muslims made the effort of reading the prophets they would realize that the LORD clearly commanded the **whole world** to honor him using this specific title. As it is written, *"There is no other God but me, a righteous God and Saviour. There is none but me. Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other. I have sworn by my own name; ... Every knee will bend to me, and every tongue will confess allegiance to me."* (Isaiah 45:21-23)

How Does the (Jewish) Savior-God Bring Salvation to the Whole World?

We've seen how the OT prophets praised God for accomplishing mighty exploits of deliverance. But there is something else the prophets highlighted which is virtually synonymous with saving power, that is, salvation. The prophets foretold that God's servant would come – the Messiah. God described the Messiah's mission saying, *"I will make you a light to the Gentiles and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."* (Isaiah 49:6)

Seven hundred years later we read in the Gospel (Injil) how Isaiah's prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus Christ (Al Masihi Isa) was born. Notice how this nativity story – in the Bible and Qur'an – tells of a special name revealed through the angel. (Surah 3:45; Matthew 1:21) This common belief lends itself to friendly discussions between Muslims and Christians. Furthermore, as we ponder this miraculous sign from Allah (see Surah 30:21; 21:91), our discussion becomes even more stimulating, i.e. "seasoned with salt." (Colossians 4:6) Our hope is that Muslims will be motivated to explore specifically how the [Messiah brought salvation](#).

Speaking of giving children names, it is interesting to see how Muslims are encouraged to choose meaningful names for their children. If we apply this to how God chose a name for the new-born Messiah we find an amazing insight. I've asked many Muslims, "Do you think Allah chose the name Jesus/Isa randomly as in a lucky draw or do you think he chose the name purposefully and wisely?" How do you think they replied? They consistently said that God would not choose a 'lucky' name. He would choose purposefully in keeping with what he knew of the future. As one Muslim writer put it, the name reflects a person's personality or accomplishments. As Christians we could not agree more strongly, especially with regards to Jesus' name!

Some Christians are amazed to find out that our Muslim friends can agree on this point – that is, Allah chose a fitting name. So where does this discussion lead us? What is the next piece of the puzzle?

Do you recall Isaiah's prophecy which we read a moment ago? (Isaiah 49:6) This strategic choice of a name provides a clue to those who will "ponder" this sign of Allah (cf. Surah 30:21). The name Jesus, meaning 'God is salvation', fittingly summarizes Isaiah 49:6.

You will remember how the OT portrays God's saving power by rescuing people in perilous circumstances. Similarly, in the NT the Messiah is described as intervening and saving people who were in life-threatening situations. Rescuing people in such situations confirmed the meaning of his name.

1. Jesus healed sick people, not just those who were mildly sick, but those who were terminally ill. (Matthew 11:5; cf. Surah 5:113)
2. Jesus saved his disciples from a perilous storm
3. Jesus even saved people who had gone beyond the brink of death, into the grave. (John 11; Surah 5:113)
4. Jesus saved people from their sin. (Luke 19:1-10) As we have recounted OT stories we learned that God intervened and rescued his servants in extremely dangerous circumstances. Most stories focus on a physical rescue but at a deeper level these stories usually imply that God saved people by forgiving their sin. The same holds true in the NT. Jesus not only saved people physically he saved them spiritually. Both layers of meaning are important. God worked through Jesus to save people from death (physical deliverance) AND from sin (spiritual deliverance).

Perhaps you have found these insights eye-opening. You've learned how Muslims can acknowledge that the one true God proved himself greater than impotent idols, so he is 'mighty to save.' You've also been surprised to see that Muslims – in dialog with a Christian – can acknowledge prophecies about the Messiah bringing God's salvation to the ends of the earth. (If they don't agree, at least they can ponder it!)

As we've been tracing the theme of salvation from the OT to the NT perhaps you've also been surprised to learn that some Muslims acknowledge God chose Jesus' name wisely – and that his name means 'God is salvation'. Not only so, this meaning is reflected in Christ's personality and accomplishments!

Christians may well ask themselves, "How is it possible that Muslims can acknowledge so many similar beliefs and yet it is incredibly difficult for them to accept the Lord Jesus as Savior?" The fact is: they are able to connect the dots. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see where the discussion is leading. If we read Luke 19:1-10 where Jesus saves/forgives a sinner like Zacchaeus he might connect the dots to the end of Christ's life – his climactic saving act on the cross where he takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29) Three of the more common reasons why Muslims find it difficult to accept the Messiah as Savior are:

1. Islam emphatically denies that Messiah died on the cross.
2. Muslims deny Christ's deity (in fact, this is the unforgivable sin).
3. To become a Christian means becoming an apostate – a crime punishable by death.

What does all this mean with regard to our earlier discussion, i.e. in terms of the Almighty One (Allah) who is 'mighty to save'? In conclusion, consider this question that summarizes our discussion; "Is this Jewish Savior-God the same as the Islamic Allah?"

At this point in our dialogue journey, we may find some Muslims parting ways. It should sadden our hearts whenever a person turns his back on God's mercy through one Mediator – the sacrificial Lamb of God, Christ Jesus.

I trust that you, the reader, will appreciate how difficult it is to explain the theme of salvation in just a few pages. My prayer is that this brief overview will help Christians and Muslims engage in discussing these important truths in a gracious and mutually respectful way. Let us bear in mind how Jesus told the woman of Samaria, 'God the Father is seeking people from all cultures to worship him in spirit and in truth.' For those of us who are Christians, let us pray that God's Spirit would open the hearts of our Muslim acquaintances and friends to gain a

fresh understanding of God's salvation. Let us be alert to opportunities to connect and talk with one another as genuine friends (just as our Master showed us in his example of dialog with the Samaritans in John chapter 4). If you would like to receive an article which shows glimpses of how Christ seamlessly interweaved grace and truth throughout his dialog with the Samaritans contact Roland Clarke [here](#).

As we conclude, let us look briefly at another monotheistic faith which, in many ways, parallels Islam: the religion of Samaritanism.

Is the Samaritan God (Elohim) the Same as the Jewish God? (also named Elohim)

Probably you can see a similarity between this question and what we asked earlier: "Is the Qur'anic God (Allah) the same as the Allah whom Arab Christians worship?" The answer to both questions initially seems to be, "Yes". But let us pause and ask ourselves, "How would Jesus answer this question?" A careful reading of John chapter 4 shows that Jesus did not answer this affirmatively. He spoke frankly with the Samaritan woman, "*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews ... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.*" (John 4:21-23, NIV)

Jesus did not exactly tell her that her understanding of Elohim – the name both groups used for Almighty God – was incorrect. He told her, "*You Samaritans worship what you don't know.*" What Jesus said next was very significant. He put his finger on the key flaw in her religion – "salvation is from the Jews." Samaritanism, like Islam, prided itself in being monotheistic. Over the years, they distanced themselves from their Jewish cousins so much so that they became increasingly disconnected from (and unaware of) the theme of salvation as taught by the prophets. This theme can only be grasped as one reads the Messianic prophecies. These particular prophecies are recorded in the scriptures which Samaritan leaders branded as corrupt and not worth reading, i.e. all the prophetic writings which were written **after** the Pentateuch.

My wife uses an analogy to explain the puzzling question about the real identity of the One who is called God by followers of different monotheistic faiths, i.e. Allah or Elohim. Let's suppose Nelson Mandela's biography is penned by an honest, objective author. Later a dishonest schemer also writes a biography which gives a distorted portrait of Mandela. Both biographies identify him by his correct name (outwardly) but one of them isn't the true Mandela.

This analogy also explains the finer nuance of [counterfeit](#) or forgery. A false biography that is obviously at variance with what everyone knows to be true of Mr. Mandela will not sell. It has to be close enough to the truth to be seen as plausible. In the case of a criminal who forges money, the more the counterfeit money can be made to look like real currency, the more successful he will be at deceiving people. At the beginning we noted how this question is being asked more frequently than ever: "*Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?*" Now as we conclude, I trust you realize how **urgent** this question is.

Here is the conclusion to the whole discussion: The most recurring and prominent signature attribute of God which distinguishes him as the true God is that he is 'mighty to save'. He alone is Savior. It is [precisely this criterion](#) that Jesus applied to the Samaritans when he said, "*You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for **salvation** is from the Jews ...*" (John 4:22, NIV, bold font added for emphasis)

The author has written a couple dozen articles that are available online [here](#).

Several of these are formatted as booklets with ornamental graphics. They can be downloaded [here](#).

If you want to order hardcopies of these booklets or if you have any pertinent questions you would like to discuss please contact [me](#).

Bible quotations are taken from the New Living Translation unless otherwise noted.

Concluding Chorus

Having **spoken** the praises of the 'mighty-to-save' God it is only fitting to join the chorus of praise by **singing** the well known song ['Mighty to Save.'](#) As you sing the words "he can move the mountains" I want you to think about the 'mountain' that Moses and his people faced as they stood before the Red Sea, "trapped in the wilderness" - so Pharaoh thought - and facing what seemed an inevitable onslaught from the Egyptian armies which were now about to overtake them. (Exodus 14:3ff)

Allah: The god of Islam

By [Georges Houssney](#) on February 2nd, 2010

At the moment a Muslim is born and again on his death bed, seven Arabic words are whispered into his ears: "La ilaha ilia Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah" which translates, "(There is) no god except Allah; Muhammad (is) Allah's prophet." This creed, which is the focal point of Islamic religion, is instilled into the mind of a Muslim from cradle to grave. It is repeated five times a day in the call to prayer. Muslims are also encouraged to repeat the name of Allah as many times as possible throughout the day.

Allah predates Islam

The word "Allah" predates Islam. Each Arab tribe had its own idol gods and goddesses, but a number of tribes also acknowledged the existence of an "unknown god" they called al-ilah, which literally means "the god." He was considered to be the invisible, supreme deity; however, they did not have a unified concept of who he was. In due time, Allah became "...a universalization of the tribal god who was often referred to as al-ilah (the god). When the tribe encountered another tribe who had a god whom they also referred to as al-ilah, they both thought that they were referring to the same being, and so a universal idea of Allah grew among the Arabs." (Nazir Ali, p. 26)

Allah and a great number of his 99 other names are commonly used in naming male Arabs today. This tradition was practiced in Arabia even before Islam. Muhammad's own father bore the name Abd-Allah (slave of Allah). The fact that these names were commonly used among Arab idol worshipers before Islam attests to the fact that Allah was not the God of the Bible. Rather, he was a pagan deity known only to the Arabs of the Peninsula. Arabic poetry of the Jahilia (ignorance) period before Islam shows this clearly.

The Kaaba was known as beit-Allah or "the house of Allah." Even though it housed 360 idol gods, the Kaaba was ultimately the house of Allah, the supreme pagan god. As lord of the Kaaba, he was not represented by a tangible statue like the 360 idols inside the Kaaba were. Would Jehovah, the God of the Bible, dwell in a house along with 360 idol gods and goddesses?

Arab prophets

Muhammad was not the first Arab to try to promote a monotheistic worship of Allah. Before him came other Arab prophets with similar messages. A man named Hud from the tribe of A'd in southern Yemen preached for several years, but had only a small following. Salih from the tribe of Thamud, close to the Gulf of Aqaba, preached against polytheism. His own people rejected his message and decided to keep their idols. Shua'yb from the Hijaz tribe was just one of several who tried to call the Arabs to believe in Allah and destroy all their other gods. One particular group called the Hanifs tried to promote the supremacy of Allah over other gods. Arabs rejected the message of such prophets and of the Hanifs, preferring their visible gods.

Muhammad — last Arab prophet

It is vital for the student of Islam to realize that Muhammad continued the legacy of his predecessors who had no awareness of Judaism and Christianity and made no claims to be associated with either. These Arab prophets promoted a strictly Arab cause and an Arab deity.

Muhammad was the last in a succession of prophets who had one common purpose, to unite the Arabs under one supreme deity. In fact, a close look at his religious experience, his message and his leadership style places him firmly within Arab tradition. His call to belief in Allah as the only deity is basically the same message that his Arab predecessors had preached.

However, Muhammad had a better chance of succeeding in his mission due to the wealth he had gained by marrying Khadija, the prominent position his Quraish tribe held in relationship to other Arab tribes and the influence of the Jews and Christians who contributed to his doctrinal development. Further, Arabs are infatuated with poetry to which they attribute demonic power. Because the Quran's style of Arabic was poetical and attractive, Arabs thought of Muhammad as sophisticated, articulate and powerful.

Is Allah the God of Abraham?

Muslim tradition traces Allah to the monotheistic faith of Abraham. Muslims claim that Ishmael and his ousted mother, Hagar, settled in Mecca where Abraham visited them frequently. Abraham was believed to have introduced the belief in one God to the Arabian tribes.

However, there is absolutely no historical evidence to back up the claim that Abraham ever stepped into Arabia. In fact, the Bible clearly states in Genesis 21:8-21 that Hagar and Ishmael wandered in the desert of Beersheba. With little to eat and drink, they could only have traveled a short distance. Hagar and Ishmael settled in the desert of Paran, which is located in the north central region of the Sinai desert, about one thousand miles away from Mecca. Ishmael, who married an Egyptian like his mother, remained in the region with his twelve children, all of whom settled in the Sinai near the border of Egypt according to Genesis 25:18. Therefore, the claims that Abraham had built the Kaaba and that the well God provided for Hagar and Ishmael is Zamzam in Mecca are completely unsubstantiated. There is also no evidence that the monotheism of the Arabs had any roots in Abraham.

The religious practices of pre-Islamic Arabia were confined to the desert gods who were lifeless and impersonal meteorite stones. They could neither hear nor talk. Though he was recognized as the supreme deity, Allah was some kind of a mysterious god; invisible, aloof and unknowable. Certain tribes in Arabia were aware of his existence, but his attributes were unknown to them. Arabs knew little about Allah, and the little they attributed to him was derived from their pagan concept of deity. Allah was so vague and impersonal that, as a rule of thumb, anything said about a human being could not be said about him. He was better described by what he was not than by what he was. This made him more frightening and mysterious, and therefore less attractive.

Is Allah Jehovah?

Muhammad must have found it intriguing that both Jews and Christians considered Abraham the grandfather of their respective faiths. He saw in this common denominator a factor which could potentially unite all inhabitants of Arabia in spite of their various religious backgrounds. He claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael. He chose the Arabic name "Allah" after considering other names like "Ar-Rahman" (Surah 2:163) and attributed to him pagan, Jewish and Christian characteristics. He hoped that this would be a drawing card in mobilizing support for his newly formulated religion.

However, it is critical to understand that whatever Muhammad imported from Judaism and Christianity into Islam was marginal, and that at its core his concept of God remained pagan. We see little evidence that the Judeo-Christian view of God has had a major impact on the overall worldview of Muhammad and his Muslim followers. This is evident in the writings of Muslim theologians throughout the centuries.

With this in mind, we can conclude that the Allah of Islam, though he has characteristics similar to the God of the Bible, was a pagan god used as a political tool to unite the Arabs under the ambitious leadership of Muhammad. A closer look at the Islamic worldview shows us that the pagan characteristics of Allah dominate the Muslim's mindset. Any similarities between Allah of Islam and the Judeo-Christian God are marginal. For instance, at the core of Islamic doctrine is the belief that Allah is impersonal. All of his attributes stem from this concept. Antithetically, at the core of the Judeo-Christian faith is the belief that God is personal. All His attributes center around that belief. Here lies the great schism in the worldviews of Muslims and Christians.

Conclusion

The Islamic concept of Allah dominates the heart and mind of a Muslim, and therefore it is the greatest obstacle to a Muslim's understanding of the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible. The Christian God is a personal, loving Father who has entered human history to reveal Himself to us and rescue us from our sinfulness. He has paid the price for our sin in order to free us, restore us to His image and give us assurance of eternal life.

Explaining this to a Muslim is like explaining the life of a bird to a fish confined to an aquarium. It goes against the grain of his whole religious and cultural system. Though offensive, it is the greatest news a Muslim can ever receive. We cannot adequately relate to Muslims, nor can we help a Muslim understand the God of the Bible, until we have grasped an accurate understanding of their concept of Allah in contrast to the God of the Bible.

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Allah of Islam, Is He Yahweh God of the Bible?

[Sam Shamoun](#)

Jalal Abualrub has decided to write an entire book responding to Craig Winn's *The Prophet of Doom* ([online edition](#)), titled *The Prophet of Mercy*. The first two chapters of Abualrub's book can be downloaded from his website ([1](#), [2](#)).

As time permits, and solely by the grace of the Lord Jesus, we will tackle those parts of the response that are relevant to biblical issues and doctrines. We will, if necessary, address Abualrub's distortions of key essential Christian doctrines, as well as his distortions of Islamic theology and Muslim sources.

In this, our first response, we seek to address Abualrub's defense of Allah being the God of the Holy Bible, as opposed to being the moongod or some other pagan deity (*).

Some introductory remarks are necessary before we proceed to address Abualrub's claims. My own personal view regarding the use of the word Allah is that if treated as a generic noun, a common noun denoting any deity, then it is acceptable as a reference for the true God of the Holy Bible. However, Islamic theology does not treat Allah as a generic noun, but views it as their god's own personal name. In Muslim thinking, Allah functions as the proper name of the deity, much like the name Peter or John. This is where the problem lies since, according

to the Holy Bible, the one noun which functions as the true God's proper name is Yahweh, not Allah. The fact that Muslims view the name Allah as a proper noun, as opposed to a common noun descriptive applicable to any deity, and that the Quran nowhere uses the name Yahweh in connection to god, is sufficient evidence to show that we are not dealing with the same God revealed in the Holy Bible. This will become more evident as we examine the etymology of the word Allah, and the manner in which the word was used prior to the advent of Islam.

With this stated we can now focus on what Abualrub writes:

Allah is the Moon God?

Evangelicals are so desperate to convince the general public of Islamic evilness that one website of theirs (<http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/moongod.htm>) actually suggested that Allah is the Moon-God, and thus, Muslims worship the moon. They must mean the same moon about which the Quran declares this, { **And from among His Signs are the night and the day, and the sun and the moon. Prostrate yourselves not to the sun, nor to the moon, but prostrate yourselves to Allâh Who created them, if you (really) worship Him** }; [41:37]. These people are utterly blatant and will stop at nothing, including lying in a shameful way, to defame Islam. This Quranic Verse refutes their article in its entirety, and we will soon refute the minor parts of it, Allah willing.

RESPONSE:

Note first: Abualrub likes to attack ALL Evangelicals for what SOME Evangelicals do or think. Most Evangelicals who write about Islam do NOT claim that Allah is the moon god (the many authors in this very site, THE major Evangelical website on Islam, do not propagate this theory), and basically no Evangelical claims that Muslims are worshipping the moon. Christians or Evangelicals as a whole are not evil and guilty simply because a few among them supposedly do something that Abualrub does not like.

If one actually reads the article referred to in the above quotation, it will be rather obvious that Abualrub is grossly distorting what the author says. Here are some relevant quotes, adding some emphasis for the sake of clarity:

The Muslims claim that Allah in PRE-ISLAMIC times was the biblical God of the Patriarchs, prophets, and apostles. The issue is thus one of continuity. Was "Allah" the biblical God or a pagan god in Arabia during PRE-ISLAMIC times? The Muslim's claim of continuity is essential to their attempt to convert Jews and Christians for if "Allah" is part of the flow of divine revelation in Scripture, then it is the next step in biblical religion. Thus we should all become Muslims. But, on the other hand, if Allah was A PRE-ISLAMIC PAGAN DEITY, then its core claim is refuted. Religious claims often fall before the results of hard sciences such as archeology. We can endlessly speculate about the past or go and dig it up and see what the evidence reveals. This is the only way to find out the truth concerning THE ORIGINS OF ALLAH. As we shall see, the hard evidence demonstrates that the god Allah was a pagan deity. In fact, he was the Moon-god who was married to the sun goddess and the stars were his daughters.

... When the popularity of the Moon-god waned elsewhere, the Arabs remained true to their conviction that the Moon-god was the greatest of all gods. While they worshipped 360 gods at the Kabah in Mecca, the Moon-god was the chief deity. Mecca was in fact built as a shrine for the Moon-god.

The evidence reveals that the temple of the Moon-god was active even in the Christian era. Evidence gathered from both North and South Arabia demonstrate that Moon-god worship was clearly active even in Muhammad's day and was still the dominant cult. According to numerous inscriptions, while the name of the Moon-god was Sin, his title was al-ilah, i.e. "the deity," meaning that he was the chief or high god among the gods. As Coon pointed out, "The god Il or Ilah was originally a phase of the Moon God." The Moon-god was called al-ilah, i.e. the god, which was shortened to Allah IN PRE-ISLAMIC TIMES. The pagan Arabs even used Allah in the names they gave to their children. For example, both Muhammad's father and uncle had Allah as part of their names.

The fact that they were given such names by their pagan parents proves that Allah was the title for the Moon-god even in Muhammad's day. Prof. Coon goes on to say, "*Similarly, under Mohammed's tutelage, the relatively anonymous Ilah, became Al-Ilah, The God, or Allah, the Supreme Being.*"

This fact answers the questions, "*Why is Allah never defined in the Qur'an? Why did Muhammad assume that the pagan Arabs already knew who Allah was?*" Muhammad was raised in the religion of the Moon-god Allah. But he went one step further than his fellow pagan Arabs. While they believed that Allah, i.e. the Moon-god, was the greatest of all gods and the supreme deity in a pantheon of deities, Muhammad decided that Allah was not only the greatest god but the only god.

The Muslim's claim that Allah is the God of the Bible and that Islam arose from the religion of the prophets and apostles is refuted by solid, overwhelming archeological evidence. Islam is nothing more than A REVIVAL of the ancient Moon-god cult. It has taken the symbols, the rites, the ceremonies, and even the name of its god from the ancient pagan religion of the Moon-god. As such, it is sheer idolatry and must be rejected by all those who follow the Torah and Gospel.

This article is not alone in stating that al-ilah, specifically Ilah, from whence we get Allah, was a title for the moon-god Sin:

"The relation of this name, which in Babylonia and Assyrian became a generic term simply meaning 'god', to the Arabian Ilah familiar to us in the form Allah, which is compounded of al, the definite article, and Ilah by eliding the vowel 'i', is not clear. Some scholars trace the name to the South Arabian Ilah, a title of the Moon god, but this is a matter of antiquarian interest." (Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* [Penguin Books Inc., Baltimore, 1956], p. 7; underline emphasis ours)

The paper also mentions that the ninth century Christian apologist, Abd al-Masih al-Kindy, asserted that Muslims got their conception of Allah from the Sabaeans:

Al-Kindi, one of the early Christian apologists against Islam, pointed out that Islam and its god Allah did not come from the Bible but from the paganism of the Sabaeans. They did not worship the God of the Bible but the Moon-god and his daughters al-Uzza, al-Lat and Manat...

Here are some quotes from the late, great Sir William Muir's commentary on the Apology of Al-Kindy:

The first Section is devoted to a defence of the doctrine of the Trinity, in which the argument is, to our apprehension, often weak and far-fetched. His friend had invited him to embrace the Catholic, or *Hanyfite*, faith of Abraham, their common father. Our Apologist answers **that the Hanyfite faith was in reality the idolatrous religion of the Sabaeans**, which the patriarch professed before his conversion to the worship of the One true God. "Which of these two religions of Abraham," he asks, "am I to adopt? If it be the Unity, I reply that the revelation thereof made to Abraham was inherited by Isaac, not by Ishmael, and descended in the line not of the Arabs, but of the Israelites; and it is for them, and not for you, to invite me to the same." ... (Muir, *The Apology of Al Kindy Written at the Court of Al Mamun (Circa A.H. 215; A.D. 830): In Defence of Christianity Against Islam*, pp. 41-42; [online edition](#); bold emphasis ours)

What makes this truly interesting is that the following source states that the Sabaeans worshiped the moon and even called it Allah!

... Particular to Arabia, Coon elucidates on this phenomenon of astral preference,

"Among the northern Semites the sun was the most important, as the promoter of fertility in vegetation; in southern Arabia, where the sun is too hot for comfort, and scorches and withers, the night is the time for coolness, and, in the moonlight, the time for travel and work. Nomads travel much at night, and the moon with its phases gives them their yardstick for measuring time. Thus, whereas the sun was the important god to the northern Semites, the moon was supreme among the southern groups, including not only the southern Arabian peoples, but also the pre-Islamic Arabs proper, who lived farther north in the peninsula."³⁸

There is much evidence to connect Allah with the worship of the moon god in Arabia. The moon god, whether by the name of Sin or by some other, was worshipped in temples all across the peninsula. The Sabaeans even had a moon god whose specific appellation was "Allah"³⁹ ... ([Source](#))

Ironically, the Muslims were identified as Sabeans by those around them, presumably due to the similarities in their beliefs:

... Then the Prophet proceeded on and the people complained to him of thirst. Thereupon he got down and called a person (the narrator 'Auf added that Abu Raja' had named him but he had forgotten) and 'Ali, and ordered them to go and bring water. So they went in search of water and met a woman who was sitting on her camel between two bags of water. They asked, "Where can we find water?" She replied, "I was there (at the place of water) this hour yesterday and my people are behind me." They requested her to accompany them. She asked, "Where?" They said, "To Allah's Apostle." She said, "Do you mean the man **WHO IS CALLED THE SABI**, (with a new religion)?" They replied, "Yes, the same person. So come along." They brought her to the Prophet and narrated the whole story. He said, "Help her to dismount." The Prophet asked for a pot, then he opened the mouths of the bags and poured some water into the pot. Then he closed the big openings of the bags and opened the small ones and the people were called upon to drink and water their animals. So they all watered their animals and they (too) all quenched their thirst and also gave water to others and last of all the Prophet gave a pot full of water to the person who was Junub and told him to pour it over his body. The woman was standing and watching all that which they were doing with her water. By Allah, when her water bags were returned she looked like as if they were more full (of water) than they had been before (Miracle of Allah's Apostle) Then the Prophet ordered us to collect something for her; so dates, flour and Sawiq were collected which amounted to a good meal that was put in a piece of cloth. She was helped to ride on her camel and that cloth full of food-stuff was also placed in front of her and then the Prophet said to her, "We have not taken your water but Allah has given water to us." She returned home late. Her relatives asked her: "O so and so what has delayed you?" She said, "A strange thing! Two men met me **and took me to the man WHO IS CALLED THE SABI**' and he did such and such a thing. By Allah, he is either the greatest magician between this and this (gesturing with her index and middle fingers raising them towards the sky indicating the heaven and the earth) or he is Allah's true Apostle." ...

Abu 'Abdullah said: The word Saba'a means "The one who has deserted his old religion and embraced a new religion." Abul 'Ailya said, "**The Sabis are a sect of people of the Scripture who recite the Book of Psalms.**" (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 1, Book 7, [Number 340](#))

... Abu Dhar went to the Mosque, where some people from Quraish were present, and said, 'O folk of Quraish ! I testify that None has the right to be worshipped except Allah, and I (also) testify that Muhammad is Allah's Slave and His Apostle.' (Hearing that) the Quraishi men said, '**Get at this SABI (i.e. Muslim)!**' They got up and beat me nearly to death. Al 'Abbas saw me and threw himself over me to protect me. He then faced them and said, 'Woe to you! You want to kill a man from the tribe of Ghifar, although your trade and your communications are through the territory of Ghifar?' They therefore left me. The next morning I returned (to the Mosque) and said the same as I have said on the previous day. They again said, '**Get at this SABI!**' I was treated in the same way as on the previous day, and again Al-Abbas found me and threw himself over me to protect me and told them the same as he had said the day before.' So, that was the conversion of Abu Dhar (may Allah be Merciful to him) to Islam." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 4, Book 56, [Number 725](#))

... So when he came to Mecca, someone said to him, "**You have become A SABIAN?**" Thumama replied, "No! By Allah, I have embraced Islam with Muhammad, Apostle of Allah. No, by Allah! Not a single grain of wheat will come to you from Jamaica unless the Prophet gives his permission." (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 5, Book 59, [Number 658](#))

... Unais went until he came to Mecca and he came to me late. I said: What did you do? He said: I met a person in Mecca who is on your religion and he claims that verily it is Allah Who has sent him. I said: What do the people say about him? He said: They say that he is a poet or a Kahin or a magician. Unais who was himself one of the poets said. I have heard the words of a Kahin but his words in no way resemble his (words). And I also compared his words to the verses of poets but such words cannot be uttered by any poet. By Allah, he is truthful

and they are liars. Then I said: you stay here, until I go, so that I should see him. He said: I came to Mecca and I selected an insignificant person from amongst them and said to him: **Where is he whom you call as-Sabi?** He pointed out towards me saying: **He is Sabi.** Thereupon the people of the valley attacked me with sods and bows until I fell down unconscious. I stood up after having regained my consciousness and I found as if I was a red idol... These women met Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) and Abu Bakr who had also been coming down the hill. He asked them: What has happened to you? They said: **There is Sabi, who has hidden himself between the Ka'ba and its curtain.** He said: What did he say to you? They said: He uttered such words before us as we cannot express. Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) came and he kissed the Black Stone and circumambulated the House along with his Companion and then observed prayer, and when he had finished his prayer, Abu Dharr said: I was the first to greet him with the salutation of peace and uttered (these words) in this way; Allah's Messenger, may there be peace upon you, whereupon he said: It may be upon you too and the mercy of Allah. He then said: Who are you? I said: From the tribe of Ghifar. He leaned his hand and placed his finger on his forehead and I said to myself: Perhaps he has not liked it that I belong to the tribe of Ghifar... (*Sahih Muslim*, Book 031, [Number 6046](#))

Hence, the issue of the paper is one of pre-Islamic worship, whether in pre-Islamic times Allah was a pagan deity, or was he considered the same true God of the Holy Bible. The article clearly recognizes that during Muhammad's time, Allah went from being a name for the chief pagan deity of Mecca to the true, universal God worshiped even by Jews and Christians. The paper, therefore, is not claiming that Muslims are *knowingly* worshiping the moon god, but that the god which they believe is the true universal sovereign of all was originally nothing more than a pagan deity, the high god of a pantheon of lesser gods, which Muhammad then turned into the one god of all. In other words, despite the Muslims *thinking* that they are worshiping the one true God revealed in the Holy Bible, in reality they are *unknowingly* worshiping a pagan deity which Muhammad passed off as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

For more on the issue of whether the name Allah initially referred to a moon deity or not, please read the articles posted in the following link: www.answering-islam.org/Index/M/moongod.html

Before KJV of the Bible Was Ever Written, There Were Arabic Bibles Calling the Lord by His Name, 'Allah'

Craig Winn does not like to call Allah by His Name, 'Allah'. However, the name 'Allah' is found in all the Arabic Bibles that have been printed in the West –in tens of millions– by Evangelical Christians and freely distributed in poor Arab and Muslim countries to preach the Monotheistic Gospel to pagan Muslims! **I know that 'Allah' is the name used in these Arabic Bibles, because I received several of them when I was living in Kuwait.** For evidence, the reader is encouraged to log onto this website: (<http://www.esword.net/bibles.html>) wherein the word 'Allah' is used in the first verse contained in the version of the Bible entitled, The *Arabic Smith & Van Dyke Bible* . Further, (http://www.arabicbible.com/bible/codex_151.htm) posts this article: “ The Mt. Sinai Arabic Codex 151 is indeed a most exciting discovery. It appears to be the oldest Arabic translation of the Bible in existence which was done in 867 AD...It was discovered at St. Catherine monastery in Mt. Sinai in the 1800's. ” **The 'oldest copy' of the Arabic Bible referred to here also uses the word 'Allah' when describing the Creator .**

I read various copies of the Arabic Gospel¹² about a dozen times, in addition to the dozen times in which I read various English Bibles. I do not claim to have become a scholar on the Bibles, because to be as such, one certainly needs more than 10,000 hours.

RESPONSE:

We are glad that Abualrub has decided to appeal to the Arabic Bible in order to establish his position, since this will backfire against him, as we will see below. As we will be showing, although the term Allah was/is used by Jews and Christians, they obviously do not have the same Being in view that the Muslims do. In fact, neither Jews nor Christians view Allah as the personal name of their God.

Did Jesus Ever Call the Lord by, 'God'?

Matthew 27:46 states, “ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? ”

If Muslims are challenged to bring forth the original Arabic words of their Holy Book, the Quran, they will produce a copy of it that is perfectly identical to every other copy that Muslims have in any other part of the world. Can Christians or Jews accomplish the same fete regarding the Two Testaments?

RESPONSE:

I am assuming that Abualrub is citing the words of the Lord Jesus to prove that he cried out to Allah, or that Allah is a more accurate word to use than the English word God. To see why he is mistaken, we only need to cite the original language of the texts in question, taking a look at Psalm 22:1 first, since this is where Jesus quoted from:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?" Psalm 22:1

Hebrew- *Eli, Eli, lamah 'azavtani?*

Syriac- *'Alahi 'Alahi lemana' sebaqtani?*

Arabic- *'Ilaahiy 'Ilaahiy, limaadhaa taraktaniy?*

In the Psalm citation, the word used for God is *Eli*, from the word *el*, with the letter *i* being the possessive suffix "my." The word *el* is often used as a part of people's names, as in Isra-EL, Ishma-EL, Immanu-EL etc. The Quran takes over some of these names, but instead of retaining the word *el*, it uses its Arabic equivalent *il*:

O Children of **Isra-EL (Isra'IL)**! Remember My favour wherewith I favoured you, and fulfil your (part of the) covenant, I shall fulfil My (part of the) covenant, and fear Me. S. 2:40

Remember We made the House a place of assembly for men and a place of safety; and take ye the station of Abraham as a place of prayer; and We covenanted with Abraham and **Isma'IL (Ishma-EL)**, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer). S. 2:125 Y. Ali

The Syriac and Arabic translations of this Psalm use *alah* and *ilah* in place of *el*. Neither word corresponds exactly to Allah, even though they are related. We will explain this more thoroughly later on in the paper.

And now Jesus' words, taken from the Markan parallel:

"And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, *'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*' which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me (*ho theos mou ho theos mou eis ti me egkatelipes?*)?' Mark 15:34

Arabic- *wa fi assaa3ati atthaalitati, sarakha yasou3 bisawtin 3adhiymin: 'alowiy 'alowiy, lamaa shabaqtaniy? 'ay: 'ilaahiy 'ilaahiy, limaadhaa taraktaniy?*

Again, the words used are Aramaic *eloi*, Greek *theos*, and Arabic *ilah* respectively. All these words are used generically to refer to any person or thing, and not just for the true God. Why this is important will become clearer a little later on.

I challenge the readers, Craig Winn and all of Christendom and Judaism to produce a single original manuscript of the Torah or the Gospel -with stress on the word, 'original'. If anyone is ever able to successfully respond to this challenge, that original copy will most certainly be in a language other than English and will not contain the word, 'God' to describe the Creator.

Here is the very first verse in the 'version' of the Bible called, Transliterated Pronounceable , **Genesis 1:1** , " Bree'shiyt baaraa' 'Elohiym 'eet hashaaamayim w'eethaa'aarets. " If transliterated into English, this verse reads like this (as in KJV), " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. "

RESPONSE:

Abualrub seems to be rather confused at this point, or at least inconsistent, since he demands of Christians what he himself cannot produce for his own book. If by original manuscript Abualrub means the original languages in which the books of the Holy Bible were written (i.e. Hebrew, Aramaic, Koine Greek), then yes we can produce those. If, by original manuscript, Abualrub means the very document written by the prophet or apostle, known as the autograph, then the answer is rather obvious. No Christian or Jew can produce the autograph, but neither can Abualrub produce the original Quranic manuscript written down by Muhammad or by one of his scribes. In fact, there wasn't just one manuscript of the Quran, but several which were compiled after Muhammad's death. It was Uthman who decided to standardize what he felt was the more authentic version from many competing codices which were written down by ear and eye witnesses of Muhammad, men who had committed the Quran to memory. Uthman decided to burn these other primary codices.

In fact, even to this day there isn't one version of the Quran, but at least two that are still used from over a dozen versions. These versions are called *qiraat*, or readings, by Muslims, which they expediently deem to be equally authoritative:

When reading the Qur'an, we frequently refer to Warsh or Hafs and say, "This is Hafs" or "This is Warsh". What we mean by that is that this is the riwaya or Warsh or the riwaya of Hafs. It is the riwaya of a particular qira'a. The qira'at or the readings, or methods of recitation, are named after the leader of a school of Qur'an reciters. Each qira'a derives its authority from a prominent leader of recitation **in the second or third century hijri** who in turn trace their riwaya or transmission back through the Companions of the Prophet. For instance, in the back of a Warsh Qur'an, you are likely to find "the riwaya of Imam Warsh from Nafi' al-Madini from Abu Ja'far Yazid ibn al-Qa'qa' from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas from Ubayy ibn Ka'b from the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, from Jibril, peace be upon him, from the Creator." Or in Hafs you will see "the riwaya of Hafs ibn Sulayman ibn al-Mughira al-Asadi al-Kufi of the qira'a of 'Asim ibn Abi'n-Nujud al-Kufi from Abu 'Abdu'r-Rahman 'Abdullah ibn Habib as-Sulami from 'Uthman ibn 'Affan and 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Zayd ibn Thabit and Ubayy ibn Ka'b from the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace." These all go back to the Prophet.

There are slight differences in these readings, for example, where one stops, as in Surat al-Baqara (1): "Dhalika'l-Kitabu la rayb" or "Dhalika'l-Kitabu la rayba fih" as well as some vowelizing differences ("suddan" or "saddan"), and sometimes a difference in the letters due to different diacritical marks, as ya' or ta' (turja'una or yurja'una). Sometimes a word will have a shadda or not have a shadda...

Today, the two readings most used are the qira'a of 'Asim in the riwaya of Hafs, and the qira'a of Nafi' in the riwaya of Warsh. Also in use in Africa is the qira'a of Abu 'Amir in the riwaya of ad-Duri. ([Source](#); bold emphasis ours)

(C)ertain variant readings existed and, indeed, persisted and increased as the Companions who had memorised the text died, and because the inchoate (basic) Arabic script, lacking vowel signs and even necessary diacriticals to distinguish between certain consonants, **was inadequate**. ... **In the 4th Islamic century**, it was decided to have recourse (to return) to "readings" (*qira'at*) handed down from seven authoritative "readers" (*qurra'*); in order, moreover, to ensure accuracy of transmission, **two "transmitters" (*rawi*, pl. *ruwah*) were accorded to each**. There resulted from this **seven basic texts** (*al-qira'at as-sab'*, "the seven readings"), each having two **transmitted versions (*riwayatan*) with only minor variations in phrasing**, but all containing meticulous vowel-points and other necessary diacritical marks. ... The authoritative "readers" are:

Nafi' (from Medina; d. 169/785)

Ibn Kathir (from Mecca; d. 119/737)

Abu 'Amr al-'Ala' (from Damascus; d. 153/770)

Ibn `Amir (from Basra; d. 118/736)

Hamzah (from Kufah; d. 156/772)

al-Qisa'i [sic] (from Kufah; d. 189/804)

Abu Bakr `Asim (from Kufah; d. 158/778)

(Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* [Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1989], p. 324, bold added)

The following Salafi website acknowledges this mass confusion which surrounded the Quran's transmission:

Secondly, what is meant by styles (*ahruf*, sing. *harf*)?

The BEST of the scholarly OPINIONS concerning what is meant is that there are seven ways of reciting the Qur'aan, **where the wording may differ** but the meaning is the same; if there is a different meaning then it is by way of variations on a theme, not opposing and contradiction.

Thirdly ...

It is known that Hishaam was Asadi Qurashi (i.e., from the clan of Bani Asad in Quraysh) and `Umar was `Adawi Qurashi (i.e., from the clan of Bani `Adiyy in Quraysh). **Both of them were from Quraysh and Quraysh had only one dialect.** If the difference in *ahruf* (styles) had been a difference in dialects, why would two men of Quraysh have been different?

The scholars mentioned NEARLY FORTY DIFFERENT OPINIONS concerning this matter! Perhaps the most correct is that which we have mentioned above. And Allaah knows best.

Fourthly:

It seems that the seven styles **were revealed with different wordings**, as indicated by the hadeeth of `Umar, because **`Umar's objection was to the style, not the meaning**. The differences between these styles are not the matter of contradiction and opposition, rather they are synonymous, as Ibn Mas'ood said: "It is like one of you saying *halumma*, *aqbil* or *ta'aal* (all different ways of saying 'Come here')."

Fifthly:

With regard to the seven recitations (*al-qiraa'aat al-saba'*), **this number is not based on the Qur'aan and Sunnah, rather it is the ijtihaad of Ibn Mujaahid** (may Allaah have mercy on him). People thought that *al-ahruf al-saba'* (the seven styles) were *al-qiraa'aat al-saba'* (the seven recitations) because they happened to be the same number. **But this number may have come about coincidentally, or it may have been done deliberately by Ibn Mujaahid to match what was narrated about the number of styles (*ahruf*) being seven.** Some people thought that the styles (*ahruf*) were the recitations, **but this is a mistake**. No such comment is known among the scholars. The seven recitations are one of the seven styles, and this is the style that `Uthmaan chose for all the Muslims.

Sixthly:

When `Uthmaan made copies of the Qur'aan, he did so according to one style (*harf*), but he omitted the dots and vowel points so that some other styles could also be accommodated. So the Mus-haf that was copied in his time could be read according to other styles, and whatever styles were accommodated by the Mus-haf of `Uthmaan remained in use, **and the styles that could not be accommodated fell into disuse. The people had started to criticize one another for reciting differently, so `Uthmaan united them by giving them one style of the Qur'aan.**

Seventhly:

Your saying that Mujaahid's different recitations meant the seven styles (*ahruf*) is not correct, as was said by Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah. (*Majmoo'ah al-Fatawa*, vol. 13, p. 210) ...

Islam Q&A (www.islam-qa.com)

(Question #5142: [The revelation of the Qur'aan in seven styles \(ahruf, sing. harf\)](#); bold and capital emphasis ours)

Imagine, if you would, what Abualrub would have said if Christians claimed that the Bible had been transmitted in seven different versions, or readings, and that each reading has come through two transmissions, totaling fourteen versions! And this doesn't even apply to the English translations of the Quran, but solely to the alleged Arabic original which Abualrub claims he is able to produce!

For more on this subject, please read the following articles:

<http://answering-islam.org/PQ/notrevealed.htm#top>

<http://answering-islam.org/Green/seven.htm>

<http://answering-islam.org/Green/originof.htm>

The truth of the matter is that the Holy Bible has vastly superior textual, historical, archaeological, and documentary evidence than the Quran. The Holy Bible is better attested in terms of manuscript evidence and textual purity as the following links show:

http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/qur_hist.htm

<http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/bib-qur/contents.htm>

<http://answering-islam.org/Campbell/s3c3a.html>

<http://answering-islam.org/Campbell/s3c3b.html>

<http://answering-islam.org/Campbell/s3c3c.html>

<http://answering-islam.org/Campbell/s3c3d.html>

<http://answering-islam.org/Campbell/s3c3ef.html>

<http://www.christian-thinktank.com/stil09.html>

<http://www.tektonics.org/lp/nttextcrit.html>

<http://answering-islam.org/Quran/Text/index.html>

Abualrub continues:

How can 'God', be Closer in Pronunciation to, 'Elohiym', 'Il', 'Ilu', 'Ilah', than 'Allah'?

'God', Was Never Used in Any Ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek or Latin Judaeo-Christian Scripture Manuscripts

This is an extraordinary, clear testimony regarding the etymology of the Word, 'God', that is found in, [The Catholic Encyclopedia](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608x.htm) : (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06608x.htm>) . Catholicism, much older and much larger than Protestantism, is also the largest Christian religion in the present time. **The only comments made here was that I bold-faced and underlined certain sections of this article to emphasis their content.**

" Etymology of the Word 'God': (Anglo-Saxon God; German Gott; **akin to Persian khoda; Hindu khoda**). **God can variously be defined as** : the proper name of the one Supreme and Infinite Personal Being, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, to whom man owes obedience and worship; **the common or generic name of the several supposed beings to whom, in polytheistic religions, Divine attributes are ascribed and Divine worship rendered; the name sometimes applied to an idol as the image or dwelling-place of a god.** The root-meaning of the name (from Gothic root gheu; Sanskrit hub or emu, "to invoke or to sacrifice to") is either "the one invoked" or "the one sacrificed to." From different Indo-Germanic roots (div, "to shine" or "give light"; "thes" in thessasthai "to implore") come the Indo-Iranian deva, Sanskrit dyaus (gen. divas), Latin deus, Greek theos, Irish and Gaelic dia, all of which are generic names; also Greek Zeus (gen. Dios, Latin Jupiter (jovpater), Old Teutonic Tiu or Tiw (surviving in Tuesday), Latin Janus, Diana, and other proper names of pagan deities. The common name most widely used in Semitic occurs as 'el in Hebrew, 'ilu in Babylonian, 'ilah in Arabic, etc.; and though scholars are not agreed on the point, the root-meaning most probably is "the strong or mighty one. "

The so-called 'holy' Islamic books that Winn claims to have relied on while writing his book are much older historically than any English Bible that contains the word 'God' and came into existence centuries before the King James Version of the Bible¹³.

The Arabs, children of Prophet Ishmael (Isma`el), and the Israelites, children of Prophet Jacob (Ya`qub), are cousins, being the children of Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), as the Bible itself declares. **Genesis 16:1-15**, states, "1. Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar...3. And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian...and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife¹⁴...15. And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. " Further, 'Elohiym', is Hebrew for, 'Allah'. Abraham was an Arab, from Iraq (Babylon) and the Hebrew people are his descendants, just as the Arabs. The Hebrew legacy started with Abraham (**Genesis 14: 13** , " Abram the Hebrew. ") and the children of Israel. The Arabic Language is much older than the Hebrew, and the Creator has always been called, 'Allah', in Arabic.

Conclusion: the Name of the Creator is, 'Allah', not, 'God'. Craig Winn slandered his Creator, the True Creator of everything and everyone, including Jesus and his mother.

RESPONSE:

Instead of wasting his time looking under the word God in the Encyclopedia, Abualrub should have looked for the word Allah, since this is what he would have found:

Allah

The name of God in Arabic. It is a compound word from the article, '*al*', and *ilah*, divinity, and signifies "the god" *par excellence*. This form of the divine name is in itself a sure proof that *ilah* was at one time an appellative, common to ALL the local and tribal gods. GRADUALLY, with the addition of the article, it was restricted to one of them who took precedence of the others; finally, with the triumph of monotheism, He was recognized as the only true God. In one form or another this Hebrew root occurs in all Semitic languages as a designation of the Divinity; but whether it was originally a proper name, pointing to a primitive monotheism, with subsequent deviation into polytheism and further rehabilitation, or was from the beginning an appellative which became a proper name only when the Semites had reached monotheism is a much debated question. It is certain, however, that before the time of Mohammed, owing to their contact with Jews and Christians, the Arabs were generally monotheists. The notion of Allah in Arabic theology is substantially the same as that of God among the Jews, and also among the Christians, with the exception of the Trinity, which is positively excluded in the Koran, cxii: "Say God, is one God, the eternal God, he begetteth not, neither is he begotten and there is not any one like unto him." His attributes denied by the heterodox Motazilites, are ninety-nine in number. Each one of them is represented by a bead in the Moslem chaplet, while on the one hundredth and larger bead, the name of *Allah* itself is pronounced. It is preposterous to assert with Curtiss (*Ursemitische Religion*, 119) that the nomadic tribes of Arabia, consider seriously the *Oum-el-Gheith*, "mother of the rain", as the bride of Allah and even if the expression were used such symbolical language would not impair, in the least, the purity of monotheism held by those tribes. (Cf. *Revue Biblique*, Oct., 1906, 580 sqq.) Let it be noted that although Allah is an Arabic term, it is used by all Moslems, whatever be their language, as the name of God. ([Source](#); underline and capital emphasis ours)

This Encyclopedia is not alone in suggesting that Allah is originally a contraction of two words, *al* (the definite article) and *ilah* (common noun for deity or god). There seems to be somewhat of a scholarly consensus that this is the probable origin of Allah. Yet, many Muslims believe that Allah isn't derived, but happens to be the eternal name of their god:

CONCERNING the real significance of the Arabic word *Allah* there has been much speculation and endless discussion among Moslem exegetes and lexicographers. The author of the *Muheet-el-Muheet* dictionary, a Christian, says: "Allah is the name of necessary Being. There are twenty different views as to the derivation of this name of the Supreme; the most probable is that its root is *ilāh*, the past participle form, on the measure *fi'āl*, from the verb *ilaho* = to worship, to which the article was prefixed to indicate the supreme object of worship." When we open the pages of Ferozabadi, Beidhawi or Zamakhshari and read some of these *twenty* other

derivations we find ourselves at the outset before an unknown God. The intellectual difficulty was a real one to the Moslem exegete, as he must discover some root and some theory of derivation that is not in conflict with *his* accepted idea of God. Beidhawi, for example, suggests that *Allah* is derived "from an [invented] root *ilaha* to be in perplexity, because the mind is perplexed when it tries to form the idea of the Infinite!" Yet more fanciful are the other derivations given and the Arabic student can satisfy his curiosity in Beidhawi, Vol. I., pp. 5 and 6.

According to the opinion of some Moslem theologians, it is infidelity (*kufr*) to hold that the word has any derivation whatever! This is the opinion of the learned in Eastern Arabia. They say "God is not begotten," and so if is name cannot be derived. He is the first, and had an Arabic name before the creation of the words. Allah is an eternal combination of letters written on the throne in Arabic and each stroke and curve has mystical meaning. Mohammed, they teach, received the revelation of this name and was the first to preach the divine unity among the Arabs by declaring it. This kind of argument is of one piece with all that Moslems tell us of "the days of ignorance" before the prophet. But history establishes beyond the shadow of a doubt that even the pagan Arabs, before Mohammed's time, knew their chief god by the name of *Allah* and even, in a sense, proclaimed His unity. In pre-Islamic literature, Christian or pagan, *ilah* IS USED FOR ANY GOD and *Al-ilah* (contracted to *Allah*), i.e., the god, was the name of the Supreme. Among the pagan Arabs this term denoted the chief god of their pantheon, the Kaaba, with its three hundred and sixty idols. Herodotus informs us (Lib. III, cap. viii.) that in his day the Arabs had two principal deities, *Orotal* and *Alilat*. The former is doubtless a corruption of *Allah Taal*, God most high, a term very common in the Moslem vocabulary; the latter is *Al Lat*, mentioned as a pagan goddess in the Koran. Two of the pagan poets of Arabia, Nabiga and Labid,¹ use the word *Allah* repeatedly in the sense of a supreme deity. Nabiga says (Diwan, poem I., verses 23, 24): "*Allah* has given them a kindness and grace which others have not. Their abode is *the* God (*Al-ilah*) himself and their religion is strong," etc.

Labid says: "Neither those who divine by striking stones or watching birds, know what *Allah* has just created."²

Ash-Shabristani says of the pagan Arabs that some of them "believed in a Creator and a creation, but denied Allah's prophets and worshipped false gods, concerning whom they believed that in the next world they would become mediators between themselves and Allah." And Ibn Hisham, the earliest biographer of Mohammed whose work is extant, admits that the tribes of Kinanah and Koreish used the following words when performing the pre-Islamic ceremony of *ihlal*.¹ "We are present in thy service, O God. Thou hast no partner except the partner of thy dread. Thou ownest him and whatsoever he owneth."



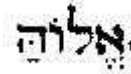
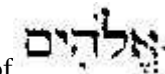
As final proof, we have the fact that centuries before Mohammed the Arabian Kaaba, or temple at Mecca, was called *Beit-Allah*, the house of *God* and not *Beit-el-Alihet*, the house of idols or gods. Now if even the *pagan* Arabs acknowledged Allah as Supreme, surely the Hanifs (that band of religious reformers at Mecca which rejected all polytheism and sought freedom from sin by resignation to God's will) were not far from the idea of the Unity of God. It was henotheism² in the days of paganism and the Hanifs led the way for Mohammed to preach absolute monotheism. The Koran often calls Abraham a Hanif and stoutly affirms that he was not a Jew or a Christian (Surahs 2:129; 3:60, 89; 6:162; 16:121, etc.). Among the Hanifs of Mohammed's time were Waraka, the prophet's cousin, and Zaid bin 'Amr, surnamed the Inquirer. Both exerted decided influence on Islam and its teaching. (Zwemer, *The Moslem Doctrine of God*, [pp. 23-27](#); underline and capital emphasis ours)

It is interesting that Herodotus identified *Orotal* with the pagan god, Bacchus:

[3.8] The Arabs keep such pledges more religiously than almost any other people. They plight faith with the forms following. When two men would swear a friendship, they stand on each side of a third: he with a sharp stone makes a cut on the inside of the hand of each near the middle finger, and, taking a piece from their dress, dips it in the blood of each, and moistens therewith seven stones lying in the midst, calling the while on Bacchus and Urania. After this, the man who makes the pledge commends the stranger (or the citizen, if citizen he be) to all his friends, and they deem themselves bound to stand to the engagement. They have but these two gods, to wit, Bacchus and Urania; and they say that in their mode of cutting the hair, they follow Bacchus. Now their practice is to cut it in a ring, away from the temples. Bacchus they call in their language *Orotal*, and Urania, *Alilat*. ([Source](#); see also [this article](#))

Thus, if *Orotal* is a corruption of *Allah Taal*, then this strongly supports the position that, in pre-Islamic Mecca, Allah wasn't identified with Yahweh God of the Bible.

Allah is supposed to be derived from *ilah* a deity or god, with the addition of the definite article *al-* *Al-ilah*, "the God" - or according to some authorities, it is from *lah*, ie *Allah*, "the secret one." But Abu Hanifah says that just as the essence of God is unchangeable, so is His name, and that Allah has ever been the name of the Eternal Being (See *Ghiyasu-l-Lughah*.)

Allah may be an Arabic rendered of the Hebrew  *el*, and the unused root  *ul*, "to be strong", or from , the singular form of . It is expressed in Persian and Hindustani by the word *Khuda* derived from the Persian *khud*, self; the self-existing one. (Hughes' *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 141; [online edition](#); underline emphasis ours)

The name Allah does not help us much. It is made up of the definite article al and the root 'ilh "god," derived from the same root as the Hebrew 'eloah, sometimes employed in Hebrew poetry for "God" the plural of which, 'elohim, is the most common general designation of deity in the Old Testament. Etymologists sometimes debate whether 'ilah may not be derived from the verb 'ilaha, which means "to fear," "be perplexed," "to adore." In all probability the root was at first the name of deity, signifying "the terrible one," and the verb was derived from the noun. All this, however, lay far back in Semitic heathenism. In the Old Testament Elohim means "God" (sometimes "gods") and in Moslem parlance *Al-lah* simply means: "the God", i.e., " the One True God." ([Source](#); underline emphasis ours)

Title:

The Origin of the word '*Allah*'

Question:

What is the derivation of the word "Allah"? Some scholars say it derives from al+ illah ("the God"), but many Muslim *Ulema* and translators of the Qur'an (such as Maulana Muhammad Ali) disagree with this, and say that "*Allah*" is whole in itself, as A PROPER NAME for the Supreme Creator. But is there any philological relationship between Allah and other Semitic terms for "God" such as *Eloah* (Hebrew) and *Alaha* (Aramaic/Syriac)?

Thank you.

Peace and blessings of Allah be with you.

Answer:

Although a lot has been said about the philology of the word '*Allah*', however, in my opinion, the former of the two opinions noted by you seems to be closer to the correct one. A detailed discussion compiling the opinions of various scholars of the Arabic language regarding the origin of the word can be seen in "*Lisaan al-Arab*" under the word "*Aaliha*" (*a-l-h*). In my opinion, '*Allah*' is an Arabic word meaning 'the God'. According to the general principle of making proper nouns from common nouns in the Arabic language, the word "*ilah*" (common noun) has been converted to "*al-ilah*", which became "*Allah*" due to the turgidity and the slight difficulty of pronouncing the word "*al-ilah*".

The Qur'an, because its prime and first addressees were the Arabs, used the word "*Allah*" for the Supreme Being, as that had traditionally been the word used for the Supreme Being in that language. The same had been the case in the older scriptures. Those scriptures, like the Qur'an, used the particular words for the Supreme Being, which were already in vogue in those languages, to refer to the Supreme Being.

However, there have been scholars of the Arabic language who ascribe to the opinion that "*Allah*" is THE ACTUAL NAME of the Supreme Being. It is indeed important to analyze the evidence that they have provided to support their opinion. Nevertheless, I feel that to give God a name is a requirement of us, humans. God, being the absolute being is in no need for a name. ([Source](#); as accessed on 25 February 2005; underline and capital emphasis ours)

(al'ē, ä'le), [Arab.,=the God]. **Derived from an old Semitic root referring to the Divine and used in the Canaanite El, the Mesopotamian ilu, and the biblical Elohim,** the word *Allah* is used by all Arabic-speaking

Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others. Allah, as a deity, was probably known in pre-Islamic Arabia. Arabic chronicles suggest a pre-Islamic recognition of Allah as a supreme God, with the three goddesses al-Lat, al-Uzza, and Manat as his "daughters." The Prophet Muhammad, declaring Allah the God of Abraham, demanded a return to a strict monotheism. Islam supplements Allah as the name of God with the 99 most beautiful names (*asma Allah al-husna*), understood as nondescriptive mnemonic guides to the Divine attributes. ([Source](#); bold emphasis ours)

It is a known fact that every language has one or more terms that are used in reference to God and sometimes to lesser deities. This is not the case with Allah. Allah is the personal name of the One true God. Nothing else can be called Allah. The term has no plural or gender. This shows its uniqueness when compared with the word god which can be made plural, gods, or feminine, goddess. It is interesting to notice that Allah is the personal name of God in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and a sister language of Arabic. ([Source](#); underline emphasis ours)

There are several points to be made regarding this name. From al-Qurtubi's tafseer of the basmalah in the Qur'aan, we find the following related to the meaning of this name:

- Nothing else has this name; it is not found in female or plural form.
- Some scholars say this is His greatest and most complete name.
- It has three possible meanings: the One who deserves to be worshipped, the One whose existence is a must (He has always been and always shall be), and the Unique One.

Many scholars have said this name is derived, but have differed on what it is derived from:

- some have said "ilaah", with the "alif-lam" replacing the "hamza". Seebawiyah said similarly "Al-naas" comes from "Anaas".
- some have said "laah", with the "alif-lam" used for magnification.
- "al-ilaah", with the hamza being removed and then the two "laam"s being mixed together.
- "walah" = to lose one's wits, as in while contemplating Him, trying to understand Him, we become bewildered. And "ilaah" is then derived from "walaah".
- some have said that it is the object of when the creation "yata'alahoona" to Allaah for their needs, that is, we turn to Him as our deity and ask of Him.
- from being High, as the Arabs used to say about raising something: "laaha".
- from the letter "haa" which is the pronoun for He who is absent, and added to it is "laam" to indicate ownership ("laam al-milk") since He owns everything, and finally added to that is "alif-laam" to magnify Him.

A group of scholars have said it is not derived, and that the "alif-laam" is an integral part of the name, and not the definite article. They say that the proof is that we call upon Him with "yaa Allaah", and we do not drop the "alif-laam" and say "yaa laah". Note that, for His other names like "ar-ra7maan", we say "yaa ra7maan".

And Allaah knows best. ([Source](#))

It is interesting to note that the Aramaic word "*El*", which is the word for God in the language that Jesus spoke, is certainly more similar in sound to the word "*Allah*" than the English word "*God*". This also holds true for the various Hebrew words for God, which are "*El*" and "*Elah*", and the plural form "*Elohim*". The reason for these similarities is that Aramaic, Hebrew and Arabic are all Semitic languages with common origins. It should also be noted that in translating the Bible into English, the Hebrew word "*El*" is translated variously as "*God*", "*god*" and "*angel*"! This imprecise language allows different translators, based on their preconceived notions, to translate the word to fit their own views. The Arabic word "*Allah*" presents no such difficulty or ambiguity, since it is only used for Almighty God alone. Additionally, in English, the only difference between "*god*", meaning a false god, and "*God*", meaning the One True God, is the capital "*G*". In the Arabic alphabet, since it does not have capital letters, the word for God (i.e. *Allah*) is formed by adding the equivalent to the English word "*the*" (*Al-*) to the Arabic word for "*god/God*" (*ilah*). So the Arabic word "*Allah*" literally it means "*The God*" - the "*Al-*" in Arabic basically serving the same function as the capital "*G*" in English. Due to the above mentioned facts, a more accurate translation of the word "*Allah*" into English might be "*The One -and-Only God*" or "*The One True God*". (Squires, *Who is Allah?*: [Source](#))

The foregoing information poses one of two problems for Abualrub's theory.

First off, if Allah is in fact a contraction of two words, *al* and *ilah*, then Abualrub is wrong in saying that Allah is Arabic for *elohim*. *Elohim* is the plural form of *eloah*, and in neither case do we find the definite article forming part of the words themselves as we find with Allah. The definite article in Hebrew is *ha*, not *al*, and if one wanted to speak of THE God in Hebrew, he would have to attach the definite article to the words that are commonly used for God in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., *el*, *eloah*, *elohim* etc.). Notice the following examples:

"After that God said to Jacob: 'Rise, go up to Beth'el and dwell there, and make an altar there to **the God (*ha el*)** who appeared to you when you were running away from E'sau your brother.' ... and let us rise and go up to Beth'el. And there I shall make an altar to **the God (*ha el*)** who answered me in the day of my distress in that he proved to be with me in the way that I have gone." Genesis 35:1, 3

"You—you have been shown, so as to know **that Jehovah is the God (*ha elohim*)**; there is no other besides him... And you well know today, and you must call back to your heart **that Jehovah is the God (*ha elohim*) in the heavens above and on the earth beneath**. There is no other." Deuteronomy 4:35, 39

"**Thus said God (*ha el*), Jehovah**, preparing The heavens, and stretching them out, Spreading out the earth and its productions, Giving breath to the people on it, And spirit to those walking in it." Isaiah 42:5 YLT

Secondly, despite the fact that the word *ilah* comes from the same Semitic field of words from which we get *eloah*, *el*, *il*, etc., these words were never used exclusively for the true God, but could be used for any deity worshiped by any person or groups, as both the Bible and Quran show:

"Go and cry out to **the gods (*ha elohim*)** whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress." Judges 10:14

"**God (*elohim*)** has stood in the company of **God (*el*)**, In the midst of the **gods (*elohim*)** he judges... I said, 'You are **gods (*elohim*)**, sons of the Most High, all of you;'" Psalm 82:1, 6

I have therefore delivered him into the hand of **the god (*el*) of the heathen**; he shall surely deal with him: I have driven him out for his wickedness. Ezekiel 31:11

And the king shall do as he wills. He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above **EVERY god (*el*)**, and shall speak astonishing things against **the God of gods (*El elim*)**. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished; for what is decreed shall be done. Daniel 11:36

"Know ye that **Jehovah, he is God (*elohim*)**: It is he that hath made us, and we are his; We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Psalm 100:3 ASV

"Then E-li'jah approached all the people and said: 'How long will YOU be limping upon two different opinions? **If Jehovah is the [true] God (*ha elohim*)**, go following him; but if Ba'al is, go following him.' And the people did not say a word in answer to him. And E-li'jah went on to say to the people: 'I myself have been left as a prophet of Jehovah, I alone, while the prophets of Ba'al are four hundred and fifty men. Now let them give us two young bulls, and let them choose for themselves one young bull and cut it in pieces and put it upon the wood, but they should not put fire to it. And I myself shall dress the other young bull, and I must place it upon the wood, but I shall not put fire to it. **And YOU must call upon the name of YOUR god (*elohehkhem*, plural of *eloah*)**, and I, for my part, shall call upon the name of Jehovah; and it must occur **that the [true] God (*ha elohim*)** that answers by fire is **the [true] God (*ha elohim*)**.' To this all the people answered and said: 'The thing is good.' E-li'jah now said to the prophets of Ba'al: 'Choose for yourselves one young bull and dress it first, because YOU are the majority; and call upon the name of **YOUR god (*elohim*)**, but YOU must not put fire to it.' Accordingly they took the young bull that he gave them. Then they dressed it, and they kept calling upon the name of Ba'al from morning till noon, saying: 'O Ba'al, answer us!' But there was no voice, and there was no one answering. And they kept limping around the altar that they had made. And it came about at noon that E-li'jah began to mock them and say: 'Call at the top of YOUR voice, **for he is a god (*elohim*)**; for he must be concerned with a matter, and he has excrement and has to go to the privy. Or maybe he is asleep and ought to wake up!' And they began calling at the top of their voice and cutting themselves according to their custom with daggers and with lances, until they caused blood to flow out upon them. And it came about that, as soon as noon was past and they continued behaving as prophets until the going up of the grain offering, there was no voice, and there was no one answering, and there was no paying of attention... And it came about at the time that the grain offering goes up that E-li'jah the prophet began to approach and say: 'O Jehovah, the God of Abraham,

Isaac and Israel, today let it be known **that you are God (elohim) in Israel** and I am your servant and it is by your word that I have done all these things. Answer me, O Jehovah, answer me, that this people may know **that you, Jehovah, are the [true] God (ha elohim)** and you yourself have turned their heart back.' At that the fire of Jehovah came falling and went eating up the burnt offering and the pieces of wood and the stones and the dust, and the water that was in the trench it licked up. When all the people saw it, they immediately fell upon their faces and said: '**Jehovah is the [true] God (ha elohim)! Jehovah is the [true] God (ha elohim)!**'" 1 Kings 18:21-29, 36-39

"The house that I am to build will be great, for our God is greater than **all gods (ha elohim)**." 2 Chronicles 2:5

"There is none like you among **the gods (ha elohim)**, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours." Psalm 86:8

In the Aramaic portions of Ezra, Jeremiah, and Daniel, the word used for God or the gods is *elah*, which corresponds to the Hebrew *eloah*:

"Thus you shall say to them, '**The gods (elahaiya)** that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'" Jeremiah 10:11

"Then Daniel went to his house and made the matter known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, and told them to seek mercy from **the God (elah) of heaven** concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his companions might not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. Then the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed **the God (elah) of heaven**. Daniel answered and said: 'Blessed be the name of **God (elaha)** forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.'" Daniel 2:18-20

Note how the biblical authors used *elohim*, *eloah*, *el*, *elim* (plural of *el*), Aramaic *elah* etc., for the true God, but also for any god, gods, goddesses, and/or even human beings that the peoples worshiped. These words are also used for God's agents, whether angels or humans such as prophets, priests etc. The above passages, therefore, indicate that none of these words were considered to be exclusive names of the true God, but served as generic nouns or descriptions of anyone or anything which was taken as an object of worship or considered mighty and strong.

God **there is no god (la ilaha) but He**, the Living, the Everlasting. Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep; to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth. Who is there that shall intercede with Him save by His leave? He knows what lies before them and what is after them, and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge save such as He wills. His Throne comprises the heavens and earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not; He is the All-high, the All-glorious. S. 2:255

They have taken as lords beside Allah their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary, when they were bidden to worship **only One God (ilahan wahidan)**. There is no **God (ilaha)** save Him. Be He Glorified from all that they ascribe as partner (unto Him)! S. 9:31

Your God is One God (Ilahukum ilahun wahidan). But as for those who believe not in the Hereafter their hearts refuse to know, for they are proud. S. 16:22

Allah hath said: Choose not **two gods (ilahayni)**. There is **only One God (ilahun wahidun)**. So of Me, Me only, be in awe. S. 16:51

If there were therein **gods (alihatun)** beside Allah, then verily both (the heavens and the earth) had been disordered. Glorified be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (unto Him). S. 21:22

Say: It is only inspired in me **that your God is One God (ilahukum ilahun wahidun)**. Will ye then surrender (unto Him)? S. 21:108

And argue not with the People of the Scripture unless it be in (a way) that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say: We believe in that which hath been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; **our God and your God is One (wa-ilahuna wa-ilahukum wahidun)**, and unto Him we surrender. S. 29:46

Most surely **your God (ilahakum)** is One: S. 37:4

And He it is Who in the heaven is **God (ilahun)**, and in the earth **God (ilahun)**. He is the Wise, the Knower. S. 43:84

In the above examples, the author uses the word *ilah* when speaking either of the false gods of the pagans, or when affirming that Allah is the one and only God or *ilah*. He doesn't use the word Allah, implying that the author didn't view Allah as a generic noun applicable for any deity. These passages seem to presuppose that Allah functions as the proper name of the deity preached by Muhammad.

We earlier had cited some Muslim sources which agreed that Allah was a proper name. Dr. Jamal Badawi is another Muslim who essentially argues that Allah is the proper name of the god of Muhammad. In his debate with Dr. Robert Morey, which took place on November 9, 1996 in Columbia at the University of South Carolina, titled, "Is the 'Allah' of the Qur'an the one true and universal God?," he approvingly cited some scholarly sources to prove that Allah was the God of the Bible, or at least an applicable term denoting the true God of all. One of his sources, *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (1965), says that Allah,

"... was and is the proper name of God among Muslims ..." (underline emphasis ours)

Some other references that he cited regarding Allah being a proper name include the following:

Presented in Islam as the proper name of God. (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987, p. 27; underline emphasis ours)

The proper name of God among Muslims ... (*Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1962, p. 326; underline emphasis ours)

What this basically comes down to is that if the word Allah is derived from *ilah*, then there is nothing special in the Muslim god being called Allah. Allah, much like the English word God, just so happens to be a generic noun that can be used for any deity, not just for the true God of the Holy Bible. Thus, just because Muslims call their god Allah doesn't mean that they are worshiping the same true God as revealed in the Holy Bible. In other words, even though Arab speaking Jews and Arabic Christians use the word Allah when speaking of the God they believe in, this doesn't mean that they have the same God in mind as the Muslims.

If, on the other hand, Muslims claim that Allah is not derived from *ilah*, but is the eternal, unchangeable name of their god, then this only proves that the god revealed in Islam cannot be the true God revealed in Holy Scripture. The everlasting name of the true God of the Holy Bible is not Allah, nor is it *el*, *elohim*, *eloah*, *elah* etc. The proper name of the God of Abraham is Yahweh (Jehovah):

"God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "Yahweh [YHWH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." **This is my name FOREVER, and thus I am to be remembered throughout ALL GENERATIONS.**'" Exodus 3:15

"God spoke to Moses and said to him, '**I am Yahweh.** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but **by MY NAME Yahweh** I did not make myself known to them.'" Exodus 6:2-3

"Yahweh is a man of war; **Yahweh is his name.** Exodus 15:3

"that they may know that you alone, **whose name is Yahweh**, are the Most High over all the earth." Psalm 83:18

"I am Yahweh; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols." Isaiah 42:8

"And Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day **Yahweh will be the only one, and His NAME the only one.**" Zechariah 14:9

As the following Bible dictionary puts it:

Strictly speaking, Yahweh, is the only 'name' of God. In Genesis wherever the word *sem* ('name') is associated with the divine being that name is Yahweh. When Abraham or Isaac built an altar 'he called on the name of Yahweh' (Gn. xii. 8, xxvi. 25).

... Yahweh, therefore, in contrast with Elohim, is a proper noun, the name of a Person, though that Person is divine. As such, it has its own ideological setting; it presents God as a Person, and so brings Him in to relationship with other, human, personalities. It brings God near to man, and He speaks to the Patriarchs as one friend to another. (*The New Bible Dictionary*, J.D. Douglas, organizing editor [William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, MI; reprinted, April 1967], p. 478)

It is truly astonishing that the name Yahweh does not appear even once in the entire Quran, despite its repeated claim that it comes from the same true God of Abraham! The Quran in several places claims to be complete. If

the Quran is a book complete in and of itself, why does it nowhere contain the name of God as revealed to His previous prophets?

The late James Hastings beautifully summed up the Muslim dilemma in his monumental Encyclopedia:

ALLAH is the proper name of God among Muslims, corresponding in usage to Jehovah (Jahweh) among the Hebrews. Thus it is NOT to be regarded as a common noun meaning 'God' (or 'god') and the Muslim MUST USE ANOTHER WORD OR FORM if he wishes to indicate any other than his own peculiar deity. Similarly, no plural can be formed from it, and though the liberal Muslim may admit that Christians or Jews call upon Allah, he could never speak of the Allah of the Christians or the Allah of the Jews. Among current Arabic Bible versions, 'God' ... [Elohim] is uniformly rendered *Allah*, but when 'the Lord God' ... [YHVH Elohim] occurs, it is rendered *ar-rabbu-l-ilahu*, 'the Lord, the *Ilah*,' where 'the *Ilah*' is an uncontracted form retaining its force of a common noun with the article, from which *Allah* has been shortened through usage. The Muslim, too, who usually derives and explains *Ilah* as meaning 'worshipped,' uses it and its plural *Alihai* in the broadest way, of any god, explaining that such is possible because worshippers believe that their god has a claim to worship, and 'names follow beliefs, not what the thing is in itself' (*Lisan*, xvii. 358). But more ordinarily, in referring to the gods of the heathen, a Muslim speaks simply of their images or idols, *asnam*, *authan*.

... Muhammad found the Meccans believing in a supreme God whom they called Allah, thus already contracted. With Allah, however, they associated other minor deities, some evidently tribal, others called daughters of Allah. Muhammad's reform was to assert the solitary existence of Allah...

Naturally, this precise historical origin is not clear to the Muslim exegetes and theologians. But that Allah is a proper name, applicable only to their peculiar God, they are certain, and they mostly recognize that its force as a proper name has arisen through contraction in form and limited in usage. (Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 326; underline emphasis and comments within brackets are ours)

Hastings knew that Allah functioned as the proper name of the god worshiped by Muslims, much like Jehovah, and wasn't simply a common generic noun denoting any deity.

Now Abualrub may argue that the exact pronunciation of Yahweh has been lost, thereby proving that this name is not the one eternal name which God wanted to be known by. This is irrelevant for at least two reasons. First, the Hebrew Scriptures still retain the consonants of the name Yahweh, i.e. Yodh He Waw He, and therefore haven't been lost. Second, there is plenty of evidence showing that the proper way of pronouncing the four consonants (also known as the Tetragrammaton) is by adding *a* and *e* to them, whereby we get Yahweh:

Overwhelming scholarly opinion holds that [YHVH] was in Moses' time pronounced ... (Yahveh). There is also a shorter form of the Name, Yah ... which may represent the original from which Yahveh was expanded or may, contrariwise, be a contraction of the longer ascription..." (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, edited by W. Gunther Plaut [Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1981], p. 426; words in brackets ours)

The judicious reader will perceive that the Samaritan pronunciation *Jabe* probably approaches the real sound of the Divine name closest; the other early writers transmit only abbreviations or corruptions of the sacred name. Inserting the vowels of Jabe into the original Hebrew consonant text, **we obtain the form Jahveh (Yahweh), which has been generally accepted by modern scholars as the true pronunciation of the Divine name.** It is not merely closely connected with the pronunciation of the ancient synagogue by means of the Samaritan tradition, but it also allows the legitimate derivation of all the abbreviations of the sacred name in the Old Testament. ([Source](#); bold emphasis ours)

Based on philology and representations in ancient languages such as Greek (see below), most scholars consider this [Yahweh] the original pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton. This form has been used in Christian translations such as the Jerusalem Bible. ([Source](#))

Church Fathers and Magic Papyri.

The cures, or the exorcisms, of demons in the name of Jesus which are mentioned in the New Testament and the Talmud (see Exorcism) imply that Jesus was regarded as a god and that his name was considered as efficacious as the Tetragrammaton itself, for which it was even substituted. It was in connection with magic that the Tetragrammaton was introduced into the magic papyri and, in all probability, into the writings of the Church Fathers,

these two sources containing the following forms, written in Greek letters: (1) "Iaouee," "Iaoue," "Iabe,"; (2) "Iao," "Iaho," "Iae"; (3) "Aia"; (4) "Ia." It is evident that (1) represents יהוה, (2) יהו, (3) אהיה, and (4) יה. The three forms quoted under (1) are merely three ways of writing the same word, though "Iabe" is designated as the Samaritan pronunciation. There are external and internal grounds for this assumption; for the very agreement of the Jewish, Christian, heathen, and Gnostic statements proves that they undoubtedly give the actual pronunciation (Stade's "Zeitschrift," iii. 298; Dalman, *l.c.* p. 41; Deissmann, "Bibelstudien," pp. 1-20; Blau, *l.c.* p. 133). The "mystic quadriliteral name" (Clement, "Stromata," ed. Dindorf, iii. 25, 27) was well known to the Gnostics, as is shown by the fact that the third of the eight eons of one of their systems of creation was called "the unpronounced," the fourth "the invisible," and the seventh "the unnamed," terms which are merely designations of the Tetragrammaton (Blau, *l.c.* p. 127). Even the Palestinian Jews had inscribed the letters of the Name on amulets (Shab. 115b; Blau, *l.c.* pp. 93-96); and, in view of the frequency with which the appellations of foreign deities were employed in magic, it was but natural that heathen magicians should show an especial preference for this "great and holy name," knowing its pronunciation as they knew the names of their own deities.

Meaning and Etymology.

It thus becomes possible to determine with a fair degree of certainty the historical pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, the results agreeing with the statement of Ex. iii. 14, in which Yhwh terms Himself אהיה "I will be," a phrase which is immediately preceded by the fuller term "I will be that I will be," or, as in the English versions, "I am" and "I am that I am." The name יהוה is accordingly derived from the root הוה (= היה), and is regarded as an imperfect. **This passage is decisive for the pronunciation "Yahweh"; for the etymology was undoubtedly based on the known word.** The oldest exegetes, such as Onkelos, and the Targumim of Jerusalem and pseudo-Jonathan regard "Ehyeh" and "Ehyeh asher Ehyeh" as the name of the Divinity, and accept the etymology of "hayah" = "to be" (comp. Samuel b. Meir, commentary on Ex. iii. 14). Modern critics, some of whom, after the lapse of centuries, correct the Hebrew texts without regard to the entire change of point of view and mode of thought, are dissatisfied with this etymology; and their various hypotheses have resulted in offering the following definitions: (1) he who calls into being, or he who gives promises; (2) the creator of life; (3) he who makes events, or history; (4) the falling one, the feller, *i.e.*, the stormgod who hurls the lightning; (5) he who sends down the rain (W. R. Smith, "The Old Testament," p. 123); (6) the hurler; (7) the destroyer; (8) the breather, the weather-god (Wellhausen). All these meanings are obtained by doing violence to the Hebrew text (Herzog-Hauck, "Real-Encyc." viii. 536 *et seq.*). ([Source](#); bold emphasis ours)

It is very likely that the name was actually pronounced very much like "Yahweh." Comparisons with transliterations of the name into other alphabets from very ancient times confirm this. The best argument for this spelling is that it is probably historically accurate. However, it is less familiar than Jehovah, and it seems to many to be an unnecessary striving to try and change to the form which is probably more correct. Actually, all the names which begin with "J" in our English Bibles were pronounced in their original language with a "Y" sound, as in "hallelu-Yah." (*World's Bible Dictionary*, Katherine Harris ed. [Word Publishing, Nashville TN, 2004], p. 444)

One line of evidence supporting this rendering and pronunciation comes from the NT itself:

"After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, 'Hallelujah ('Allelouia)!' Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, ... Once more they cried out, 'Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!' ... Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.'" Revelation 19:1, 3-4, 6

The word 'Allelouia is Greek for Hebrew *Hallelujah* (*Halleluyah*), meaning "praise to Yah," Yah being an abbreviation for Yahweh. Greek, unlike biblical Hebrew, does include vowels, showing that the *Yodh He* of the divine name should be pronounced Yah.

More importantly, this argument would actually discredit Muhammad, since the claim of Muslims is that Muhammad came to restore the faith. If Muhammad was a prophet of God sent to restore the true religion of God, why did God not reveal to him the correct way to pronounce His name, of which Yahweh Himself said

"This is my name FOREVER"? That Muhammad did not acknowledge Yahweh as the name of God, which even other non-Israelites acknowledged as being His name (i.e., Job is an example), is further evidence that his witness is not in accord with that of the prophets of God.

There are other reasons proving that Allah of Islam is not the true God of the Holy Bible, Yahweh, some of which we include here:

Yahweh is Father and has children, whereas Allah is not a father to anyone:

Allah says in the Quran:

The Jews say, 'Ezra is the Son of God'; the Christians say, 'The Messiah is the Son of God.' That is the utterance of their mouths, conforming with the unbelievers before them. God assail them! How they are perverted! S. 9:30

And they say, 'The All-merciful has taken unto Himself a son. **You have indeed advanced something hideous!** The heavens are wellnigh rent of it and the earth split asunder, and the mountains wellnigh fall down crashing **for that they have attributed to the All-merciful a son; and it behoves not the All-merciful to take a son. None is there in the heavens and earth but he comes to the All-merciful as a servant;** He has indeed counted them, and He has numbered them exactly. Every one of them shall come to Him upon the Day of Resurrection, all alone. S. 19:88-93

Contrast this with what the true God says:

"You neglected the Rock **who begot you**, And forgot the God **who gave you birth**." Deuteronomy 32:18

"I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are *My Son*, Today I have *begotten You*.'" Psalm 2:7

"He will cry to Me, '**You are my Father**, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' I also shall make him **My firstborn**, The highest of the kings of the earth." Psalm 89:26-27

"Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name **or His Son's name?** Surely you know!" Proverbs 30:4

"**For You are our Father**, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us You, O LORD, **are our Father**, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name." Isaiah 63:16, cf. 64:8

"Do we not all have **one father?** Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" Malachi 2:10

"For this reason seeing the greatness of this plan by which you are built together in Christ], I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, For Whom every family in heaven and on earth is named [that Father from Whom all fatherhood takes its title and derives its name]." Ephesians 3:14-15 Amplified Bible

"Immediately coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon Him; and a voice came out of the heavens: '**You are My beloved Son**, in You I am well-pleased.'" Mark 1:10-11

"For God so loved the world, that He gave **His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. **For God did not send the Son into the world** to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed **in the name of the only begotten Son of God**." John 3:16-18

According to the Holy Bible, Allah of the Quran is the spirit of Antichrist since he denies both the Fatherhood of God and the Sonship of Christ:

"Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? **This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son**. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also." 1 John 2:22-23

Abualrub may wish to say that the reason why the Quran never applies the word father to Allah is because of the pagan environment which Muhammad found himself in. Abualrub may reason that the Quran was trying to prevent people from picturing Allah as the pagans did, namely, as a male deity who has a female consort, a goddess, with whom he has sex. The problem with this reasoning is that the Israelites also found themselves surrounded by pagans and pagan conceptions of gods having sex with goddesses or humans. But this still didn't stop the true God from calling himself Father or of speaking of his people as his children. Yahweh made sure to inform his people that he wasn't Israel's father in the way the pagans understood it, since he isn't a material being who engages in sexual relations with anyone. He was their father in a very real and spiritual way.

Yahweh manifested in human form and took on a human nature. Allah did neither:

"So Jacob was left alone, and **a man** wrestled with him till daybreak. When **the man** saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with **the man**. Then **the man** said, 'Let me go, for it is daybreak.' But Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' **The man** asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he answered. Then the man said, 'Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.' Jacob said, 'Please tell me your name.' But he replied, '**Why do you ask my name?**' Then he blessed him there. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, '**It is because I saw God face to face**, and yet my life was spared.'" Genesis 32:24-30

"Micaiah said, 'Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. **I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left.** The LORD said, "Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, "I will entice him." The LORD said to him, "How?" And he said, "I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so." Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you.'" 1 Kings 22:19-23

"In the year of King Uzziah's death **I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.** Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, 'Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips; **For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.**'" Isaiah 6:1-5

"And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; **and seated above the likeness of a throne WAS A LIKENESS AS IT WERE OF A HUMAN FORM. And upward from what had the appearance OF HIS LOINS I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance OF HIS LOINS I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him.** Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. **Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD.** And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. AND HE SAID TO ME, 'Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak with you.' And when he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me upon my feet; and I heard him speaking to me. AND HE SAID TO ME, 'Son of man, I SEND YOU TO THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, to a nation of rebels, WHO HAVE REBELLED AGAINST ME; they and their fathers HAVE TRANSGRESSED AGAINST ME to this very day. The people also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them; and you shall say to them, "**THUS SAYS THE LORD GOD.**" And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that there has been a prophet among them. And you, son of man, be not afraid of them, nor be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns are with you and you sit upon scorpions; be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, for they are a rebellious house. And you shall speak **MY WORDS TO THEM**, whether they hear or refuse to hear; for they are a rebellious house. But you, son of man, hear what I say to you; be not rebellious like that rebellious house; open your mouth, and eat what I give you.' And when I looked, behold, **A HAND WAS STRETCHED OUT TO ME**, and, lo, a written scroll was in it; **AND HE SPREAD IT**

BEFORE ME; and it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe." Ezekiel 1:26-28, 2:1-10

Ezekiel clearly sees a human figure that he identifies as the glory of the Lord coming to speak to him. The man proceeds to speak to Ezekiel and identifies himself as the sovereign Yahweh. Thus, here is another instance where an OT prophet sees God appearing as a man.

"I kept looking Until thrones were set up, **And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames,** Its wheels were a burning fire. A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened." Daniel 7:9-10

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, **and the Word was God.** He was in the beginning with God. **All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made...** **He was in the world, and the world was made through him,** yet the world did not know him... **And the Word BECAME flesh and dwelt among us,** and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:1-3, 10, 14

"For in Him **all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form,**" Colossians 2:9

Yahweh is Spirit, and also has an eternal Spirit, whereas Allah is not a spirit:

The following Muslim scholar, while grossly distorting the Bible's teaching, has this to say about Allah being a spirit:

3. In the third aspect of *Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* Allaah is referred to without giving Him the attributes of His creation. For example, it is claimed in the Bible and Torah that Allaah spent the first six days creating the universe then slept on the seventh.²³ For this reason, Jews and Christians take either Saturday or Sunday as a day of rest in which work is looked at as a sin. Such a claim assigns to God the attributes of His creation. It is man who tires after heavy work and needs sleep to recuperate.²⁴ Elsewhere in the Bible and Torah, God is portrayed as repenting for His bad thoughts in the same way that humans do when they realize their errors.²⁵ Similarly the claim that God is a spirit or has a spirit completely ruins this area of *Tawheed*. Allaah does not refer to Himself as a spirit anywhere in the Qur'aan nor does His Prophet (saws) express anything of that nature in *Hadeeth*. In fact, Allaah refers to the spirit as part of His creation.²⁶ (Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed (Islamic Monotheism)*, Chapter 1, *Tawheed al-Asmaa was-Sifaat* (Maintaining the Unity of Allaah's Names and Attributes): [Source](#))

Another website writes:

The spirit or soul is not one of the attributes of Allaah, rather it is one of the things that have been created by Allaah. It is mentioned in conjunction with Allaah in some texts by way of honouring, for Allaah is its Creator and Sovereign, He takes it (in death) whenever He wills and He sends it whenever He wills.

What we say about the spirit is the same as what we say about the "House of Allaah", the "she-camel of Allaah", the "slaves of Allaah" and the "Messenger of Allaah". All of these created things are mentioned in conjunction with Allaah by way of honouring. (Question #50774: [He is debating with a Christian and is asking: Does God has a spirit?](#))

Contrast this, again, with God's true Word:

"Now the Egyptians are men **and not God**, And their horses are flesh **and not spirit**; So the LORD will stretch out His hand, And he who helps will stumble And he who is helped will fall, And all of them will come to an end together." Isaiah 31:3

"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. **God is Spirit**, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." John 4:23-24

"Now **the Lord is the Spirit**, and where **the Spirit of the Lord** is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from **the Lord who is the Spirit**." 2 Corinthians 3:17-18

"how much more will the blood of Christ, who through **the ETERNAL Spirit** offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God." Hebrews 9:14

Related to this point is the belief of Salafi Muslims like Abualrub that Allah actually has hands, feet, shins, a face etc., even though these things are unlike anything in creation. In other words, Abualrub believes that Allah has a body of some kind which is unlike any other body in all creation!

[1] All that has been revealed in Allah's Book [the Qur'an] as regards the [*Sifat*...] Qualities of Allah..., the Most High,- like His Face, Eyes, Hands, Shins, (Legs), His Coming, His *Istawa* (rising over) His Throne and others; His Qualities or all that Allah's Messenger... qualified Him in the true authentic Prophet's Ahadith (narrations) as regards His Qualities like [*Nuzul*... His Descent or His laughing and others etc. **The religious scholars of the Qur'an and the Sunna believe in these Qualities of Allah and they confirm that these are really His Qualities, without *Ta'wil*... (interpreting their meanings into different things etc.) or *Tashbih*... (giving resemblance or similarity to any of the creatures) or *Ta'til*... (i.e. completely ignoring or denying them i.e. there is no Face, or Eyes or Hands, or Shins etc. for Allah).** These Qualities befit or suit only Allah Alone, and He does not resemble any of (His) creatures. As Allah's Statements (in the Qur'an): (1) "There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearer, the All-Seer" (V.42:11). (2) There is none comparable unto Him (V.112:4). (Al-Imam Zain-ud-Din Ahmad bin Abdul Lateef Az-Zubaidi, *The Translation of the Meanings of Summarized Sahih Al-Bukhari Arabic-English*, Translated by: Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan [Maktaba Dar-us-Salam Publishers & Distributors, Riyadh Saudi Arabia], p. 842)

The next Muslim author, after mentioning those who seek the face of Allah, writes:

... Meaning they want to see Allah's face (because that is the greatest pleasure for the people of Paradise). **The Qur'an and the Sunnah affirm that Allah has a face, two hands, fingers, and two eyes.** Some people deny these attributes because they incorrectly suppose that by affirming them **they are humanizing Allah**. Such an argument is only valid for those who would say, for example, "Allah has hands like ours (?)" Such a statement is not allowed because it qualifies Allah's attributes without evidence from the Qur'an or the Sunnah. It would also be in contradiction to the Qur'anic verse: **<There is nothing that is like Him, and He is The Ever-Hearing, The Ever-Seeing>**. Thus we must affirm the attributes that Allah, and/or his Messenger have affirmed; we must believe that these attributes befit the Magnificence, and Glory of Allah; and we are not allowed to qualify these attributes unless Allah, and/or his Messenger have done so for us. (Waleed K.S. Al-Essa, *Authentic Supplications Of the Prophet* [A Daar of Islamic Heritage Publication, P.O. Box 831415, Miami, FL. 33283, 1993], p. 59, n. 145; bold emphasis ours)

The late Iranian Islamic scholar Dashti also mentioned a few Muslims who took the above descriptions from the Quran quite literally:

Many Moslems, however, have had rigid minds. Such men only accepted interpretations which are confirmed by Hadiths, and they considered any use of reason in religious matters to be misleading and impermissible. They took the above quoted Qur'anic phrases literally and believed that God possesses a head, mouth, eyes, ears, hands, and feet just like those of a human being. In the opinion of Abu Ma'mar al-Hodhali (d. 236/850), a preacher in Baghdad, **anyone who denied this belief was an infidel**. Adherents of the school of the famous traditionist and lawyer Ahmad b. Hanbal (164/780-241/855) have stuck to the same unthinking literalism ever since. The school's chief later exponent, Ahmad b. Taymiya, was so fanatical that he called the Mo'tazelites infidels and Ghazali a heretic; on one celebrated occasion, after quoting the Qor'an in a sermon, he said to the

congregation as he stepped down from the pulpit of the Great Mosque at Damascus, "**God will step down from His throne in the same way as I am stepping down from this pulpit.**"

These narrow-minded bigots considered not only the Mo'tazelite but even the Ash'arite theologians to be un-Islamic and condemned any sort of divergence from their own crudely simplistic views as pernicious innovation. Abu 'Amer ol-Qorashi, a Moor from Majorca who died at Baghdad in 524/1130, declared that it was heretical to understand the sentence "There is nothing similar to Him" in verse 9 of *sura 42 (osh-Showra)* as meaning what it says; it meant, in his opinion, that nothing resembles God in respect of His divinity, **because "God possesses limbs and organs like yours and mine."** As proof of God's possession of such limbs and organs, Abu 'Amer ol-Qorashi cited the description of the last judgement in verse 42 of *sura 68 (ol-Qalam)* "On the day when the leg will be bared and they will be bidden to kneel but cannot," **and then slapped his thigh and said, "God has legs just like mine."** (Dashti, *23 Years: A Study of the Prophetic Career of Muhammad* [Costa Mesa, Ca. 1994; Mazda Publishers], pp. 157-158; bold and underline emphasis ours)

This belief clearly contradicts the biblical teaching regarding God being an invisible, immaterial, omnipresent entity:

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night, Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You." Psalm 139:7-12

"Am I a God who is near, declares the LORD, 'And not a God far off? Can a man hide himself in hiding places so I do not see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?' declares the LORD." Jeremiah 23:23-24

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." Colossians 1:15

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen." 1 Timothy 1:17

"which He will bring about at the proper time - He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen." 1 Timothy 6:15-16

Now, this doesn't mean that God cannot assume a visible form, since he can, as the above passages from the Old Testament clearly show. In fact, God can, if he so chooses, assume any creaturely form he wants as the following passages demonstrate:

"Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.' When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!' And he said, 'Here I am.' Then he said, 'Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And he said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." Exodus 3:1-6

"Now when all the people were baptized, Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, 'You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.'" Luke 3:21-22

The biblical teaching regarding God being an immaterial, invisible, omnipresent Being is only logical in light of the theistic position that he is the Creator of time, space and matter. Thus, if God exists before time, space, and

matter, then he must be immaterial, eternal, and spaceless (i.e., omnipresent). To believe that God has always existed with a body of some kind leads to the inevitable conclusion that space and matter are also eternal, since God must occupy some spatial dimensions if he has a body, and must exist in a material form of some kind if he has eyes, legs, shins, a face etc.

Therefore, Abualrub's position is not only contrary to the true Word of God, the Holy Bible, but it is also illogical since it leads to the view that Allah eternally exists in space and matter.

Finally, Abualrub's comments regarding Arabs being the children of Ishmael seems to assume that ALL Arabs are from Ishmael's line. This is blatantly false since not all Arab tribes descend from Ishmael, as even some Muslim scholars realized:

It has been said that all Arabs trace their origins to Ishmael, the son of Abraham; upon them both be peace, salutation and homage. However, what is well known to be true is that '*arab al-'Ariba* (the original Arabs) came before Ishmael. Among them were the peoples of Ad, Thamud, Tasm, Jadis, Umaym, Jurhum, and then 'Amaliq, as well as others known only to God. Also these peoples both came before and were contemporaries of *al-Khalil*. Yet the '*arab al-musta'riba* (Arabized Arabs), the Arabs of the Hijaz, were descendants of Ishmael, son of Abraham; upon both of them be peace. (Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya)*, translated by professor Trevor Le Gassick, reviewed by Dr. Ahmed Fareed [Garnet Publishing Limited, 8 Southern Court, south Street Reading RG1 4QS, UK; The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 1998], Volume 1, p. 1)

In fact, Ishmael wasn't even an Arab since neither his father Abraham (a Hebrew) nor his mother Hagar (an Egyptian) were Arabs! To make matters worse for Abualrub, Ishmael didn't even marry an Arab, but an Egyptian:

"While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt." Genesis 21:21

There is also much doubt whether Muhammad was truly from the line of Ishmael, as the following sources show ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#)).

Besides, even if the Arabs and Muhammad were descendants of Ishmael this wouldn't prove that they were worshiping the same true God of the Israelites. The Bible itself testifies that Ishmael's descendants eventually abandoned the worship of the true God of their father:

<http://answering-islam.org/Shamoun/ishmael-baal.htm>

To conclude, Abualrub's claim that Allah is somehow closer to the biblical names for God than the English proves absolutely nothing. Either Abualrub will have to say that Allah functions much like the English word God, as a generic noun which can be used for any deity, i.e. Jesus, Vishnu, etc., which then means that he has no case at all. After all, just because someone uses the same word for God that someone else uses doesn't mean that they both have the same God in view. Or Abualrub may wish to say that Allah is the eternal name of his deity, the proper name of the god proclaimed by the Quran, and if so, then this further proves that Allah of Islam is not the true God of the Holy Bible, Yahweh Elohim. In either case, Abualrub must contend with the fact that the Holy Bible conclusively proves that the Allah proclaimed by Muhammad is a false god.

Allah – The Greatest Deceiver of them All

[Sam Shamoun](#)

The Quran describes Allah as the best deceiver there is, a liar who is not above using the same evil and wicked schemes of his opponents.

For example, the Quran calls Allah a *makr*, in fact the best *makr* there is:

But they (the Jews) *were deceptive*, and Allah *was deceptive, for Allah is the best of deceivers* (*Wamakaroo wamakara Allahu waAllahu khayru al-makireena*)! S. 3:54; cf. 8:30

Other texts that identify Allah as a *makr* include:

Are they then secure from *Allah's deception (makra Allahi)*? None deemeth himself secure from *Allah's deception (makra Allahi)* save folk that perish. S. 7:99

So they *schemed a scheme: and We schemed a scheme* (*Wamakaroo makran wamakarna makran*), while they perceived not. S. 27:50

The word for deception/deceiver/scheme is *makr*. The lexical sources define the term as:

Miim-Kaf-Ra = To practice deceit or guile or circumvention, practice evasion or elusion, to plot, to exercise art or craft or cunning, act with policy, practice stratagem.

makara vb. (1)

perf. act. 3:54, 3:54, 7:123, 13:42, 14:46, 16:26, 16:45, 27:50, 40:45, 71:22

impf. act. 6:123, 6:123, 6:124, 8:30, 8:30, 8:30, 10:21, 12:102, 16:127, 27:70, 35:10

n.vb. 7:99, 7:99, 7:123, 10:21, 10:21, 12:31, 13:33, 13:42, 14:46, 14:46, 14:46, 27:50, 27:50, 27:51, 34:33, 35:10, 35:43, 35:43, 71:22

pcple. act. 3:54, 8:30

LL, V7, p: 256 ([Source](#))

And:

He practised DECEIT, GUILF, or CIRCUMVENTION, desiring to do another a foul, an abominable, or an evil action, clandestinely or without his knowing whence it proceeded. (*Lane's Arabic-English Lexicon*; [source](#))

Lest Muslims accuse these lexicons of bias or distortion notice what Muslim scholar Dr. Mahmoud M. Ayoub says when he asks,

"how the word *makr* (scheming or plotting), *which implies deceitfulness or dishonesty*, could be attributed to God." (*The Quran and Its Interpreters – The House of Imran* [State University of New York Press [SUNY], Albany 1992], Volume II, p. 165; italic emphasis ours)

After listing several Muslim sources he quotes a renowned Muslim expositor named ar-Razi who wrote that,

"scheming (*makr*) is actually an act of deception aiming at causing evil. It is not possible to attribute deception to God. Thus the word is one of the *muttashabihat* [multivalent words of the Quran]." (Ibid., p. 166; italic emphasis ours)

Unfortunately for ar-Razi, the Quran attributes deception to Allah since it identifies him as the best *makr* there is.

Ayoub also sources one Muslim who actually boasted of Allah being the best conniver/deceiver/schemer etc.,

"Qurtubi observes that some scholars have considered the words 'best of schemers' to be one of God's beautiful names. Thus one would pray, 'O Best of Schemers, scheme for me!' Qurtubi also reports that the Prophet used to pray, 'O God, scheme for me, and do not scheme against me!' (Qurtubi, IV, pp. 98-99; cf. Zamakhshari, I, p. 366)." (Ibid., p. 166)

And here, also, is how one of the earliest sources on the life of Muhammad interpreted Q. 8:30:

Then he reminds the apostle of His favour towards him when the people plotted against him 'to kill him, or to wound him, or to drive him out; and they plotted and God plotted, and is the best of plotters.' i.e. I DECEIVED them with My firm GUILF so that I delivered you from them. (*The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn*

Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah, with introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume [Oxford University Press, Karachi, Tenth impression 1995], p. 323; capital emphasis ours)

Thus, the Quran unashamedly calls Muhammad's god the best liar and deceiver of them all! It even dares to say that ALL deception belongs completely to Allah:

And verily, those before them *did deceive/scheme (makara)*, **but all deception/scheming is Allah's (falillahi al-makru)**. He knows what every person earns, and the disbelievers will know who gets the good end. S. 13:42

In fact, the Quran states that Allah actually raises wicked individuals to deceive and scheme:

Even so have we placed in every city, ringleaders of its wicked ones, **to scheme therein (liyamkuroo)**: but only against themselves shall **they scheme (yamkuroona)**! and they know it not. S. 6:123 Rodwell

And further commands people to do evil so that he can then have a reason to destroy them!

And when We would destroy a township **We send commandment to its folk who live at ease, AND AFTERWARD they commit abomination therein**, and so the Word (of doom) hath effect for it, and we annihilate it with complete annihilation. S. 17:16 Pickthall

The Quran uses another word to denote that Allah is a liar, a schemer who has no problems using guile, namely *kayd*:

And those who cry lies to Our signs We will draw them on little by little whence they know not; and I respite them -- assuredly My guile (*kaydee*) is sure. S. 7:182-183 Arberry

and I shall respite them -- assuredly **My guile (kaydee)** is sure. S. 68:45 Arberry

The lexicons provide the following definitions:

Kaf-Ya-Dal (Kaf-Alif-Dal) = To be about to, be just on the point of, be well nigh, intend, wish, practise an artful device, desire, contrive/plot/devise such a thing, worked or laboured at or upon anything, to do something clandestinely, to deceive/beguile/circumvent, means of evading/eluding, vomited, emitted fire, had menstrual flux, gave up his spirit.

kada vb. (1)

perf. act. 12:76

impf. act. 12:5, 21:57, 86:15, 86:16

impv. 7:195, 11:55, 77:39

n.vb. 3:120, 4:76, 7:183, 8:18, 12:5, 12:28, 12:33, 12:34, 12:50, 12:52, 20:60, 20:64, 20:69, 21:70, 22:15, 37:98, 40:25, 40:37, 52:42, 52:46, 68:45, 77:39, 86:15, 86:16, 105:2

pcple. pass. 52:42

LL, V7, p: 166, 167 ([Source](#); underline emphasis ours)

The Quran furnishes plenty of examples that exemplify the negative aspect and nature of this term, e.g. those who use *kayd* are deliberately intending something evil which results in their judgement for employing such wicked schemes:

What, have they feet wherewith they walk, or have they hands wherewith they lay hold, or have they eyes wherewith they see, or have they ears wherewith they give ear? Say: 'Call you then to your associates; then try **your guile (keedooni)** on me, and give me no respite. S. 7:195 Arberry

He [Jacob] said, 'O my son [Joseph], relate not thy vision to thy brothers, **lest they devise against thee some guile (fa yakeedoo laka kayda)**. Surely Satan is to man a manifest enemy. S. 12:5 Arberry

So when he [Potiphar] saw his [Joseph] shirt torn from behind, he said: Lo! this is of *the guile of you (kaydikunna)* women. Lo! *the guile of you (kaydakunna)* is very great. S. 12:28 Pickthall

So gather *your guile (kaydakum)*; then come in battle-line. Whoever today gains the upper hand shall surely prosper. S. 20:64 Arberry

the day when *their guile (kayduhum)* shall avail them naught, and they shall not be helped. S. 52:46 Arberry

if you have a *trick, try you now to trick Me (kaydun fa keedooni)*!' S. 77:39 Arberry

Allah is even portrayed as stooping down to the level of the deceivers and liars by acting like them in his use of guile:

They are devising guile (*ya keedoona kaydan*), and I am devising guile (*Wa akeedu kaydan*). S. 86:15-16

There is more to the story. The Quran uses yet another word in describing the deception of Allah, that word being *khida/khuda/khada*:

Verily, the hypocrites seek to deceive Allah, but it is He Who deceives them (Inna al-munafiqeena yukhadiaaooona Allaha wahuwa khadiaaahum). And when they stand up for As-Salat (the prayer), they stand with laziness and to be seen of men, and they do not remember Allah but little. S. 4:142 Hilali-Khan

Here, once again, is the lexical meaning of this specific word:

Kh-Dal-Ayn = To hide/conceal, double or fold, deceive or outwit, pretend, to enter, vary in state/condition, refrain or refuse, relinquish, to be in little demand of, deviate from the right course, resist/unyield/incompliant, turn away and behave proudly.

khada'a vb. (1)

impf. act. 2:9, 8:62

pcple. act. 4:142

khada'a vb. (3) impf. act. 2:9, 4:142

LL, V2, p: 344, 345, 346, 347 ([Source](#))

Lest there be any confusion concerning the fact that this word means that Allah is a deceiver notice how this term is used in the following references:

They (think to) deceive Allah (Yukhadiaaooona) and those who believe, ***while they only deceive (yakhdaaooona) themselves***, and perceive (it) not! S. 2:9 Hilali-Khan

And if they would ***deceive thee (yakhdaaooka)***, then lo! Allah is Sufficient for thee. He it is Who supporteth thee with His help and with the believers, S. 8:6 Pickthall

Is there any doubt that the unbelievers were using deception as they tried to deceive Muhammad and his companions? Just as there is no doubt that Allah also uses deception in deceiving them!

It gets worse. Satan accused Allah of misleading or deceiving him:

He said: Now, because ***Thou hast sent me astray (aghwaytanee)***, verily I shall lurk in ambush for them on Thy Right Path. S. 7:16 Pickthall

[Iblis (Satan)] said: "O my Lord! ***Because you misled me (aghwaytanee)***, I shall indeed adorn the path of error for them (mankind) on the earth, ***and I shall mislead (walaoghwiyanahum) them all***. S. 15:39 Hilali-Khan

What makes this last reference rather interesting is that Satan promises to do to mankind what Allah did to him, namely, pervert/deceive/mislead people from the path!

Lest a Muslim say that these are the lies of Satan, that the enemy was merely slandering Allah, here is a text where the Quran acknowledges that the Devil was right since Allah does pervert/deceive/mislead people from the way:

And my sincere counsel will not profit you, if I desire to counsel you sincerely, *if God desires to pervert you (yughwiyakum)*; He is your Lord, and unto Him you shall be returned.' S. 11:34 Arberry

To say that this is amazing would be a wild understatement.

Concluding Remarks

Our analysis has shown that Muhammad's deity is a deceiver who cannot be trusted since he lies without hesitation.

A Muslim may contend that Allah only deceives unbelievers who deserve it. The problem with this assertion is that the Muslim scripture teaches that Allah doesn't merely deceive unbelievers but also his followers.

For example, Allah deceived Muhammad into thinking that the fighting men at Badr were fewer in number than they actually were:

When Allah showed them to you in your dream as few; and if He had shown them to you as many you would certainly have become weak-hearted and you would have disputed about the matter, but Allah saved (you); surely He is the Knower of what is in the breasts. And when He showed them to you, when you met, as few in your eyes and He made you to appear little in their eyes, in order that Allah might bring about a matter which was to be done, and to Allah are all affairs returned. S. 8:43-44 Shakir

Hence, Allah lies and deceives both believers and unbelievers without discrimination. Now contrast this with how the true God Yahweh operates:

"Early in the morning, Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and all his men camped at the spring of Harod. The camp of Midian was north of them in the valley near the hill of Moreh. The LORD said to Gideon, 'You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, announce now to the people, "Anyone who trembles with fear may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. But the LORD said to Gideon, 'There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, "This one shall go with you," he shall go; but if I say, "This one shall not go with you," he shall not go.' So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, 'Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink.' Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink. The LORD said to Gideon, '**With the three hundred men that lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hands.** Let all the other men go, each to his own place.' So Gideon sent the rest of the Israelites to their tents but kept the three hundred, who took over the provisions and trumpets of the others. Now the camp of Midian lay below him in the valley." Judges 7:1-8 NIV

If this weren't bad enough, one of the greatest lies and deceptions that Allah pulled over the world is the crucifixion of Christ. According to the Quran Jesus wasn't crucified but Allah made it seem that way, thereby foisting Biblical Christianity on the masses!

And because of their saying (in boast), "We killed Messiah '*Tesa* (Jesus), son of *Maryam* (Mary), the Messenger of Allah," - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, ***but the resemblance of 'Tesa (Jesus) was put over another man (and they killed that man)***, and those who differ therein are full of doubts. They have no (certain)

knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not [i.e. *'Iesa* (Jesus), son of *Maryam* (Mary)]: S. 4:157 Hilali-Khan

That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God"; - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, ***but so it was made to appear to them***, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not:- Y. Ali

Thus, Allah duped the followers of Christ into believing that Jesus died by crucifixion and further deceived them into thinking that he was then raised back to life on the third day. They then went out preaching this message boldly, with some of them dying as martyrs as a result of it!

Interestingly, Allah's schemes or deceptions are so troublesome that they even scared Muhammad. Islam's prophet was so afraid of the schemes of his god that he prayed that Allah would not deceive him but deceive on his behalf:

3551. Ibn Abbas said: "The Prophet used to supplicate, saying: 'My Lord, aid me and do not aid against me, and grant me victory and do not grant victory over me, plot (scheme/connive/deceive) for me and do not plot (scheme/connive/deceive) against me, guide me and facilitate guidance for me, grant me victory over those who transgress against me. My Lord, make me ever-grateful to You, ever-remembering of You, ever-fearful of You, ever-obedient to You, ever-humble to You, oft-turning and returning to You. My Lord, accept my repentance, wash my sin, answer my call, make firm my proof, make firm my tongue, guide my heart, and remove the treachery of my chest (*Rabbi A 'inni Wa La Tu 'in 'Alayya, Wansurni Wa La Tansur 'Alayya, WAMKUR Li Wa La TAMKUR 'Alayya, Wahdini Wa Yassir Lil-Huda, Wansurni 'Ala Man Bagha 'Alayya. Rabbij 'alni Laka Shakkaran, Laka Dhak-karan, Laka Rahhaban, Laka Mitwa 'an, Laka Mukhbitan, Ilaika Awwahan Muniba. Rabbi Taqabbal Tawabati, Waghsil Hawbati, Wa Ajib Da 'wati, Wa Thab-bit Hujjati, Wa Saddid Lisani Wahdi Qalbi, Waslu Sakhimata Sadri*).'" (Sahih) ...

[Abu 'Eisa said:] This *Hadith* is *Hasan Sahih*. (*English Translation of Jami' At-Tirmidhi, Compiled by Imam Hafiz Abu 'Eisa Mohammad Ibn 'Eisa At-Tirmidhi*, translated by Abu Khaliyl (USA), ahadith edited and referenced by Hafiz Tahir Zubair 'Ali Za'i [Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, First Edition: November 2007], Volume 6, From Hadith No. 3291 to 3956, Chapter 45. The Book Of Supplications From The Messenger Of Allah, pp. 258-259; capital and underline emphasis ours)

Muhammad wasn't the only person troubled by Allah's lies since his closest companion was deftly afraid of his lord's schemes. If one is still in doubt as to the meaning of the term *makr* consider Abu Bakr's testimony who, despite being promised paradise by Muhammad, was rather uncertain about his status in the hereafter because of how unreliable and fickle his god is:

"Although he had such a faith, which was too great to suffice all the inhabitants of the earth, he was afraid that his heart might go astray. So, he used to utter, while weeping: 'Would that I have been a bitten tree!' Whenever he was reminded of his position in Allah's sight, he would say: 'By Allah! I would not rest assured and feel safe ***from the deception of Allah (la amanu limakr Allah)***, even if I had one foot in paradise.'" (Khalid Muhammad Khalid, *Successors of the Messenger*, translated by Muhammad Mahdi al-Sharif [Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, Beirut Lebanon, 2005], Book One: Abu Bakr Has Come, p. 99; bold and italic emphasis ours)(1)

Now if both Muhammad and Abu Bakr were afraid of Allah's schemes shouldn't Muslims also be fearful of their god's lies and deception?

This very unflattering picture of God is quite embarrassing to say the least. After all, which person would be proud of a god who is described as the best deceiver, a beguiler who schemes and deliberately plots evil in order to accomplish his purposes?

Such a depiction of the Deity is unbecoming the majesty and glory of the One who called Himself the Truth and who does not lie or change his mind since it is impossible for him to do so:

"God is not a man, *that he should lie*, nor a son of man, *that he should change his mind*. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Numbers 23:19

"He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." 1 Samuel 15:29

"Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth." Psalm 31:5

"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" John 14:6

"a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, *who does not lie*, promised before the beginning of time," Titus 1:2

"Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath. God did this so that, by two unchangeable things *in which it is impossible for God to lie*, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged." Hebrews 6:17-18

The Quran's description of Allah best fits the one whom the Lord Jesus identified as the father of all lies:

"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, *for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies*." John 8:44

In light of the foregoing it seems rather hard to deny that the spirit who spoke to Muhammad, the entity who is revealed in the Muslim scripture, is none other than Satan, the enemy of our souls, masquerading as God in order to deceive people away from the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes to you *and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted*, you put up with it easily enough... For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, *for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness*. Their end will be what their actions deserve." 2 Corinthians 11:2-4, 13-15

"But even if we *or an angel from heaven* should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" Galatians 1:8-9

Endnotes

(1) It needs to be pointed out that the Muslim translator has deliberately distorted the original text of Muhammad Khalid's book. Instead of translating the Arabic words *limakr Allah* as "the deception of Allah" he has decided to render it as, "from Allah's punishment," in order to obscure the real meaning. It seems that the Muslim translator was rather embarrassed by Abu Bakr's statement that Allah is a deceiver whose promises of granting eternal bliss to the faithful cannot be trusted.

If the reader is interested in seeing what the original text really says we suggest that they turn to page 70 of the Arabic version of Muhammad Khalid's book.

Moreover, the author conveniently forgot to mention that the reason why Abu Bakr was afraid that his heart might turn away from the faith is because this close companion of Muhammad knew what the Quran says about Allah misleading and turning people away from the guidance:

Then what is the matter with you that you are divided into two parties about the hypocrites? Allah has cast them back (to disbelief) because of what they have earned. Do you want to guide him *whom Allah has made to go astray? And he whom Allah has made to go astray, you will never find for him any way (of guidance)*. S. 4:88

And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. *Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills*. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. S. 14:4

Abu Bakr was therefore fearful of Allah turning his heart away and thereby condemning him to hell since he knew that his god was a deceiver who couldn't be trusted to do as he says. This is despite the fact that Muhammad had personally guaranteed his salvation!

Did the Meccans Worship Yahweh God?

Revisiting the Issue of the Ishmaelites and the worship of the true God

[Sam Shamoun](#)

It is asserted by Muslims that the Meccan Arabs are descendents of Ishmael. They also claim that Ishmael settled in Mecca where he, along with Abraham, built the Kabah and passed on the religion of the true God to his offspring. It is believed that throughout time the Ishmaelites perverted the worship of the true God, not by abandoning their belief in him, but by adding other gods in their worship, thus perverting the religion of the God of their father Ishmael.

Muhammad, we are told, was sent by God to restore the true and pure worship of God. One aspect of Muhammad's mission was to bring the Meccan Arabs back to the true religion which had been instituted by Abraham and Ishmael.

We have already documented why we reject the claim that the Meccan Arabs are descendents of Ishmael. For those interested to read our reasons please consult the following:

<http://answering-islam.org/Shamoun/ishmael.htm>

<http://answering-islam.org/Shamoun/ishmael2.htm>

In this article we would like to point out that the Holy Bible contradicts the Muslim assertion that the Ishmaelites were worshipping the true God Yahweh. We read in the 83rd chapter of the Psalms that the Ishmaelites did not worship Yahweh God:

"O God, do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God! For behold, **your enemies make an uproar; those WHO HATE YOU have raised their heads**. They lay crafty plans **against your people**; they consult together against **your treasured ones**. They say, 'Come, let us wipe them out as a nation; **let the name of Israel be remembered no more!**' For they conspire with one accord; **AGAINST YOU they make a covenant** - the tents of Edom **and the Ishmaelites**, Moab **and the Hagrites**, Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Asshur also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. *Selah* Do to them as you did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground. Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, who said, 'Let us take possession for ourselves of the pastures of God.' O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, so may you pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane! **Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD**. Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in

disgrace, **that they may know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.** Psalm 83:1-18

The Psalm is part of collection of Psalms which are attributed to Asaph. Asaph lived about 1000 BC, and was a leader of David's Levitical choirs, and had descendants from his line who continued as singers for many centuries. Some think that Psalm 83 was composed in 1040 BC., others at 800 BC., others claim it dates from 600 BC., and still others that date it from 400 BC.

The implication this Psalm has on the Muslim claims is quite devastating. According to this Psalm the Ishmaelites, at least from the period between 1000-400 BC., were part of the nations who hated both the true God and his covenant people. The Psalmist asks God to bring utter destruction upon these nations so that they may come to the realization that Yahweh alone is the Most High God over the earth. This means that if the Muslim claims regarding the Meccan Arabs being descendents of Ishmael are correct, then the Allah of pre-Islamic Mecca was a false god. He couldn't have been the same God worshiped by Jews and Christians.

In fact, there is evidence which points to Baal being the high god worshiped by the Meccans!

For instance, there seems to be a broad consensus that the high god of Mecca was Hubal:

"... The great god of Mecca was Hubal, an idol of carnelian." (Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad* [New Press, NY, May 2000 ISBN: 1565847520], p. 16)

"... The Ka'ba which may have initially been a shrine of Hubal alone, housed several idols ..." (Rodinson, p. 40; underlined emphasis ours)

"... The presiding deity was Hubal, a large carnelian kept inside the temple; 360 other idols were arranged outside ..." (Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* [Oxford University Press, Second edition 2000], p. 15; underlined emphasis ours)

"... Although originally under the aegis of the pagan god Hubal, the Makkan *haram* which centered around the well of Zamzam, may have become associated with the ancestral figures of Ibrahim and Isma'il as the Arab traders, shedding their parochial backgrounds sought to locate themselves within the broader reference-frame of Judeo-Christianity." (Ibid., p. 17)

"... the god of Makka, Hubal, represented by a statue of red carnelian, is thought to have been originally a totem of the Khuza'a, rulers of Makka before their displacement by the Quraysh ..." (Ibid. p. 28; underlined emphasis ours)

"... At the time of Muhammad, **the Ka'abah was OFFICIALLY DEDICATED to the god Hubal**, a deity who had been imported into Arabia from the Nabateans in what is now Jordan. But the pre-eminence of the shrine as well as the common belief in Mecca seems to suggest that it may have been dedicated originally to al-Llah, the High God of the Arabs ..." (Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* [Harper San Francisco; ISBN: 0062508865; Reprint edition, October 1993], pp. 61-62; bold and capital emphasis ours)

"... Legend had it that Qusayy had travelled **in Syria** and brought the three goddesses al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat to the Hijaz **and enthroned the Nabatean god Hubal in the Ka'abah** ..." (Armstrong, p. 66; bold emphasis ours)

Pre-Islamic Arabia also had its stone deities. They were stone statues of shapeless volcanic or meteoric stones found in the deserts and believed to have been sent by astral deities. The most prominent deities were Hubal, the male god of the Ka'ba, and the three sister goddesses al-Lat, al-Manat, and al-Uzza; Muhammad's tribe, the Quraysh, thought these three goddesses to be the daughters of Allah. **Hubal was the chief god of the Ka'ba among 360 other deities.** He was a man-like statue whose body was made of red precious stone and whose arms were of solid gold. (George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam Its Prophets, Peoples, Politics and Power* [Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN; July, 1996], p. 44; bold emphasis ours)

Hubal. An idol, God of the moon. It was set up in the Kabah and became the principle idol of the pagan Meccans. (Cyril Glassé, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam* [Harper & Row: San Francisco, 1989], p. 160; underline emphasis ours)

... the principle gods at Mecca were Hubal (god of the moon) and the female goddesses. (Ibid., p. 179)

Ibn Al-Kalbi in his *Book of Idols* notes:

The Quraysh were wont to venerate her above all other idols. For this reason Zayd ibn-'Amr ibn-Nufayl, who, during the Jahilyah days, had turned to the worship of God and renounced that of al-'Uzza and of the other idols, said:

"I have renounced both Allat and al-'Uzza,
For thus would the brave and the robust do.
No more do I worship al-'Uzza and her two daughters,
Or visit the two idols of the banu-Ghanm;
**Nor do I journey to Hubal and adore it,
ALTHOUGH IT WAS OUR LORD WHEN I WAS YOUNG."**

... The Quraysh had also several idols in and around the Ka'bah. **The greatest of these was Hubal.** It was, as I was told, of red agate, in the form of a man with the right hand broken off. It came into the possession of the Quraysh in this condition, and they, therefore, made for it a hand of gold. The first to set it up [for worship] was Khuzaymah ibn-Mudrikah ibn-al-Ya's' ibn-Mudar. Consequently it used to be called Khuzaymah's Hubal.

It stood inside the Ka'bah. In front of it were seven divination arrows (sing. *qidh*, pl. *qidah* or *aqduh*). On one of these arrows was written "pure" (*sarih*), and on another "consociated alien" (*mul sag*). Whenever the lineage of a new-born was doubted, they would offer a sacrifice to it [Hubal] and then shuffle the arrows and throw them. If the arrows showed the word "pure," the child would be declared legitimate and the tribe would accept him. If, however, the arrows showed the words "consociated alien," the child would be declared illegitimate and the tribe would reject him. The third arrow was for divination concerning the dead, while the fourth was for divination concerning marriage. The purpose of the three remaining arrows has not been explained. Whenever they disagreed concerning something, or purposed to embark upon a journey, or undertake some project, they would proceed to it [Hubal] and shuffle the divination arrows before it. Whatever result they obtained they would follow and do accordingly.

It was before [Hubal] that 'Abd-al-Muttalib shuffled the divination arrows [in order to find out which of his ten children he should sacrifice in fulfilment of a vow he had sworn], and the arrows pointed to his son 'Abdullah, the father of the Prophet. Hubal was also the same idol which abu-Sufyan ibn-Harb addressed when he emerged victorious after the battle of Uhud, saying:

"Hubal, be thou exalted" (i.e. may thy religion triumph);

To which the Prophet replied:

"Allah is more exalted and more majestic."

(Source: <http://answering-islam.org/Books/Al-Kalbi/uzza.htm>)

The Oxford Dictionary of Islam (Oxford University Press, 2003) says that Hubal was the patron deity of Muhammad's particular tribe:

Hubal A pre-Islamic deity represented by an idol in Kaaba that was destroyed by Muhammad when he conquered Mecca in 630. Patron of the Quraysh, leading tribe of Mecca. (p. 117; underlined emphasis ours)

More on this below.

F.E. Peters, though not believing that Hubal is Allah, nonetheless writes:

"Among the gods worshiped by the Quraysh, the greatest was Hubal ...

Some additional details on this cleromantic deity, the most powerful of the pagan idols of Mecca, is supplied by the Meccan historian Azraqi ...

Amr ibn Luhayy brought with him (to Mecca) an idol called Hubal from the land of Hit in Mesopotamia. Hubal was one of the Quraysh's greatest idols so he set it up at the well inside the Kab'a and ordered the people to worship it. Thus a man coming back from a journey would visit it and circumambulate the House before going to his family, and would shave his hair before it ... (Peters, *Haji: The Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places* [Princeton University Press, NJ, 1994], pp. 24-25)

Peters' footnote 59 states:

"Other sources say that it [Sam- the idol of Hubal] came from northern Jordan." (Ibid., p. 365)

The data also points in the direction of Hubal being the Arabic for the Hebrew Ha Baal, "the Baal." For instance, F.E. Peters' statement above regarding Amr ibn Luhayy bringing Hubal from Mesopotamia provides evidence that the idol was a representation of Baal.

Islamicist Martin Ling, while commenting on the origin of paganism in Mecca, further supports this when he writes:

"Khuza 'ah thus shared the guilt of Jurhum. They were also to blame in other respects: a chieftain of theirs, on his way back from a journey **to SYRIA, had asked the MOABITES to give him ONE OF THEIR IDOLS. They gave him HUBAL**, which he brought back to the Sanctuary, setting it up within the Ka'bah itself; **and it became THE CHIEF IDOL OF MECCA.**" (*Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* [Inner Traditions International, LTD. One Park Street, Rochester Vermont 05767, 1983], p. 5; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Commenting on 'Abd al-Muttalib's rediscovery of the well of Zamzam and its treasures, Lings writes:

"... So 'Abd al-Muttalib continued to dig without any actual move being made to stop him; and some of the people were already leaving the sanctuary when suddenly he struck the well's stone covering and uttered a cry of thanksgiving to God. The crowd reassembled and increased; and when he began to dig out the treasure which Jurhum had buried there, everyone claimed the right to share in it. 'Abd al-Muttalib agreed that lots should be cast for each object, as to whether it should be kept in the sanctuary or go to him personally or be divided amongst the tribe. This had become the recognised way of deciding an issue of doubt, and it was done by means of divining arrows inside the Ka'bah, **in front of THE MOABITE IDOL HUBAL ...**" (Lings, p. 11; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Ibn Kathir noted:

Ibn Hisham states that a learned man told him that 'Amr b. Luhayy once left Mecca **for Syria** on business and reached Ma'ab [Sam- possibly the Moabites] in the Balqa' region. There at that time lived the 'Amaliq [Sam- possibly the Amalekites], the sons of 'Imlaq or, as some say, 'Imliq b. Lawadh b. Sam b. Nuh. 'Amr witnessed them worshipping idols, so he asked them why. They replied that if they asked the idols for rain it came, or for victory they won it.

'Amr then asked them to give him an idol he could take to Arab lands where it could be worshipped, **and they gave him one named Hubal**. This he brought to Mecca and set on a pedestal and ordered the people to worship and venerate it. (*The Life of the Prophet Muhammad (Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya)*, Volume I, translated by professor Trevor Le Gassick, reviewed by Dr. Ahmed Fareed [Garnet Publishing Limited, 8 Southern Court, south Street Reading RG1 4QS, UK; The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, 1998], p. 42; bold emphasis ours)

Interestingly, Ibn Kathir shows that the god of Muhammad's family was Hubal, and that his grandfather even prayed to Allah by facing Hubal's idol!

Ibn Ishaq stated, "It is claimed that when 'Abd al-Mutallib received such opposition from Quraysh over the digging of *zamzam*, he vowed that if ten sons were born to him who grew up and protected him, **he would sacrifice one of them for God at the *ka'ba*.**"

"Eventually he had ten sons grown up whom he knew would give him protection. Their names were al-Harith, al-Zubayr, Hajl, Dirar, al-Muqawwim, Abu Lahab, al-'Abbas, Hamza, Abu Talib, and 'Abd Allah. He assembled them and told them of his vow **and asked them to honour his pledge to God, Almighty and All-glorious is He.** They obeyed, and asked him what he wanted them to do. He asked each of them to take an arrow, write his name on it and return to him.

"They did so and went with them inside the *ka'ba* **to the site of their god Hubal**, where there was the well in which offerings to the *ka'ba* would be placed. **There, near Hubal, were seven arrows which they would use for divining a judgement over some matter of consequence**, a question of blood-money, kinship, or the like. **They would come to Hubal to seek a resolution, accepting whatever they were ordered to do or to refrain from.**" (Ibid., pp. 126-127; bold emphasis ours)

The tradition goes on to say that the lot fell on 'Abd Allah, Muhammad's future father, meaning that he would have to be sacrificed. The Quraish convinced 'Abd al-Muttalib to find a way of sparing his son, and convinced him to consult a woman diviner. The text continues:

So they left for Medina, where they found the diviner whose name was Sajah, as Yunus b. Bukayr reported from Ibn Ishaq, was at Khaybar. They rode off again and went to her and sought her advice, 'Abd al-Muttalib telling her of the whole problem regarding him and his son. She told him: "Leave me today, **until my attendant spirit comes and I can ask him.**"

They left her **and 'Abd al-Muttalib prayed to God.** Next day they went back to her and she informed them that she had had a message. "How much is the blood-money you prescribe?" she asked. "Ten camels," they told her, that being then the case. "Then go back to your land and present your man as an offering and do the same ten camels. Then cast arrows to decide between him and them. If the divining arrow points to him then add to the number of camels **until your god is satisfied**; if it points to the camels, then sacrifice them in his place. **That way you will please your god and save your man.**"

So they went back to Mecca and, when they had agreed to do as she had said, **'Abd al-Muttalib said prayers to God.** Then they offered up 'Abd Allah and the ten camels as sacrifice **and cast the arrow.** At that point the men of Quraysh told 'Abd al-Muttalib, **who was standing near Hubal praying to God**, "It's all over! **Your God is pleased, O 'Abd al-Muttalib**"... (Ibid., p. 126; bold emphasis ours)

The foregoing makes it quite clear that the Allah to whom Muhammad's grandfather vowed and worshiped was none other than Hubal. There is simply no escaping this.

In fact, one author goes so far as to suggest that Hubal may have actually been a name personifying a specific aspect of Allah:

One aspect of Allah may have been personified in the god Hubal, who was accorded pride of place among the idols of the Kaaba. The name is said to be derived from the Semitic *Hu*, meaning 'He' or 'He is' (see 3.1), with the suffix *El*, 'God.' He was perhaps an ancient variant of Allah, and his name used to be invoked as a war-cry by the Meccans. Hubal was venerated by the Nabataeans and certain other northern tribes, but is not named in the Koran. In his youth, Muhammad helped with the preparations being made for the ceremonial installation of Hubal in the Kaba. (Benjamin Walker, *Foundations of Islam: The Making of a World Faith* [Peter Owen Publishers, London & Chester Springs, 1998], p. 42)

The following citations from Philip K. Hitti puts this all together quite nicely:

Hubal (from Aram. For vapour, spirit), evidently the chief deity of al-ka'bah, was represented in human form. Beside him stood ritual arrows used for divination by the soothsayers (*kahin*, from Aramaic) who drew lots by means of them. The tradition in ibn-Hisham, which makes 'Amr ibn-Luhayy the importer of this idol from Moab or Mesopotamia, may have a kernel of truth in so far as it retains a memory of the Aramaic origin of the deity. (*History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present*, revised tenth edition, new preface by Walid Khalidi [Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; ISBN: 0-333-63142-0 paperback], p. 100; underlined emphasis ours)

And:

Allah (*allah*, *al-ilah*, the god) was the principal, though not the only, deity of Makkah. The name is an ancient one. It occurs in two South Arabic inscriptions, one a Minean found at al-'Ula and the other Sabeian, but abounds in the form HLH in the Lihyanite inscriptions of the fifth century B.C. Lihyan, which evidently got the god from Syria, was the first center of the worship of this deity in Arabia. The name occurs as Hallah in the Safa inscriptions five centuries before Islam and also in a pre-Islamic Christian Arabic inscription found in umm-al-Jimal, Syria, and ascribed to the sixth century. The name of Muhammad's father was 'Abd-Allah ('Abdullah, the slave or worshiper of Allah). The esteem in which Allah was held by the pre-Islamic Makkans as the creator and supreme provider and the one to be invoked in time of special peril may be inferred from such koranic passages as 31:24, 31; 6:137, 109; 10:23. Evidently he was the tribal deity of the Quraysh. (Ibid., pp. 100-101; underlined emphasis ours)

Ibn Kathir noted that Muhammad's family worshiped Hubal, with the Oxford Dictionary of Islam stating that Hubal was the Quraysh's patron deity. If Hitti is correct regarding Allah being the Quraysh's tribal deity then this provides additional proof that Allah was a name for Hubal. Note the following syllogism:

1. Hubal was the chief deity of the Quraysh.
2. Allah was the chief deity of the Quraysh.
3. Therefore, Hubal was Allah in pre-Islamic times.

There is another indirect piece of evidence which links Allah to Baal. Franz Rosenthal, while commenting on the mass confusion which surrounded the Muslims regarding the precise meaning of as-samad (Cf. 112:2), posits a possible origin for the word. He says:

... There is enough room for suspicion to permit us having a look at some outside evidence.

There, we encounter a noteworthy phenomenon: the not infrequent religious connotation of the root *smd*.

In Ugaritic, *smd* appears as a stick or club that is wielded by Ba'l. In the Kilammu inscription, line 15, we find *b'l smd*, apparently, *b'l* as the owner of his divine club. In the Bible, the adherence of the Israelites to Baal of Peor is expressed by the nip'al of the root *smd*. The verb is translated by the Septuagint *heteleuse* (Numei 25:3, 5; Ps. 106:28). The use of the verb doubtlessly reflects North Canaanite religious terminology.

From Arabic sources, we learn that an idol of 'Ad was allegedly called *samud*, which brings us rather close to the environment of Muhammad ...

In view of this material, the suggestion may be made that *as-samad* in the Qur'an is a survival of an ancient Northwest Semitic religious term, which may no longer have been understood by Muhammad himself, nor by the old poets (*if the sawahid should be genuine*). This suggestion would well account for the presence of the article with the word in the Qur'an, and it would especially well account for the hesitation of the commentators vis-a-vis so prominent a passage. Such hesitation is what we would expect if we are dealing with a pagan survival from the early period of the revelation. (*What the Koran Really Says: Language, Text, & Commentary*, "Some Minor Problems in the Qur'an", edited with translation by Ibn Warraq [Prometheus Books, October, 2002, Hardcover; ISBN: 157392945X], part 5.2, pp. 336-337)

If Rosenthal is correct, then this is just additional support that Allah was the name of Hubal, and that Hubal was Arabic for Baal.

That the term Allah was used in pre-Islamic times for any pagan deity, suggesting that it is quite possible that Allah was applied to Hubal, is a view held by many scholars and writers:

"... The name used for God was 'Allah', which was already in use **for one of the local gods** (it is now also used by Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians as the name of God) ..." (Albert Hourani, *A History of Arab Peoples* [Warner Books Edition, paperback 1992], p. 16; bold emphasis ours)

"Allah, **the paramount deity of PAGAN Arabia**, was the target of worship in varying degrees of intensity from the southernmost tip of Arabia to the Mediterranean. To the Babylonians he was "*Il*" (god); to the Canaanites, and later the Israelites, he was "*El*"; the South Arabians worshiped him as "*Ilah*," and the Bedouins as "*al-Ilah*" (the deity). With Muhammad **he BECOMES Allah**, God of the Worlds, of all believers, the one and only who admits of no associates or consorts in the worship of Him. Judaic and Christian concepts of God abetted **the transformation of Allah FROM A PAGAN DEITY to the God of all monotheists**. There is no reason, therefore, to accept the idea that "Allah" passed to the Muslims from Christians and Jews." (Caesar E. Farah, Ph.D., *Islam* [Barron's Educational Series, 2000, sixth edition paperback] p. 28; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Former Muslim turned atheist Ibn Warraq writes:

We have evidence that black stones were worshiped in various parts of the Arab world; for example, **Clement of Alexandria, writing ca. 190, mentioned that "the Arabs worship stone," alluding to the black stone of Dusares at Petra**. Maximus Tyrius writing in the second century says, "**The Arabians pay homage to I know not what god, which they represent by a quadrangular stone**": **he alludes to the Kaaba that contains the Black Stone**. Its great antiquity is also attested by the fact **that ancient Persians claim that Mahabad and his successors left the Black Stone in the Kaaba, along with relics and images, and the stone was an emblem of Saturn ...**

The Black Stone itself is evidently a meteorite and undoubtedly owes its reputation to the fact it fell from the "heavens." It is doubly ironic that Muslims venerate this piece of rock as that given to Ishmael by the angel Gabriel to build the Kaaba, as it is, to quote Margoliouth, "of doubtful genuineness, since the Black Stone was removed by the ... Qarmatians in the fourth [Muslim] century, and restored by them after many years; it may be doubted whether the stone which they returned was the same stone which they removed."

Hubal was worshipped at Mecca, and his idol in red cornelian was erected inside the Kaaba, above the dry well into which one threw votive offerings. It is very probable that Hubal had a human form. Hubal's position next to the Black Stone suggests there is some connection between the two. Wellhausen thinks that Hubal originally was the Black Stone that, as we have already remarked, is more ancient than the idol. Wellhausen also points out that God is called Lord of the Kaaba, and Lord of the territory of Mecca in the Koran. The Prophet rallied against the homage rendered at the Kaaba to the goddesses al-Lat, Manat, and al-Uzza, whom the pagan Arabs called the daughters of God, **but Muhammad stopped short of attacking the cult of Hubal**. From this Wellhausen concludes **that Hubal is no other than Allah, the "god" of the Meccans**. When the Meccans defeated the Prophet near Medina, their leader is said to have shouted, "Hurrah for Hubal."

Circumambulation of a sanctuary was a very common rite practiced in many localities. The pilgrim during his circuit frequently kissed or caressed the idol. Sir William Muir thinks that the seven circuits of the Kaaba "were probably emblematical of the revolutions of the planetary bodies." While Zwemer goes so far as to suggest that the seven circuits of the Kaaba, three times rapidly and four times slowly were "in imitation of the inner and outer planets."

It is unquestionable that the Arabs "at a comparatively late period worshiped the sun and other heavenly bodies." The constellation of the Pleiades, which was supposed to bestow rain, appears as a deity. There was the cult of the planet Venus which was revered as a great goddess under the name of al-Uzza.

We know from the frequency of theophorus names that the sun (Shams) was worshiped. Shams was the titular goddess of several tribes honored with a sanctuary and an idol. Snouck Hurgronje sees a solar rite in the ceremony of "wukut" ...

The goddess al-Lat is also sometimes identified with the solar divinity. The god Dharrih was probably the rising sun. The Muslim rites of running between Arafat and Muzdalifah, and Muzdalifah and Mina had to be accomplished after sunset and before sunrise. This was the deliberate change introduced by Muhammad to suppress this association with the pagan solar rite, whose significance we shall examine later. The worship of the moon is also attested to by proper names of people such as Hilal, a crescent, Qamar, a moon, and so on.

Houtsma has suggested that the stoning that took place in Mina was originally directed at the sun demon. This view is lent plausibility by the fact that the pagan pilgrimage originally coincided with the autumnal equinox. The sun demon is expelled, and his harsh rule comes to an end with the summer, which is followed by the worship, at Muzdalifah, of the thunder god who brings fertility ...

Islam owes the term "Allah" to the heathen Arabs. We have evidence that it entered into numerous personal names in Northern Arabia and among the Nabatians. It occurs among the Arabs of later times, in theophorus names and on its own. Wellhausen also cites pre-Islamic literature where Allah is mentioned **as a great deity**. We also have the testimony of the Koran itself where He is recognized as a giver of rain, a creator, and so on; the Meccans only crime was to worship other gods beside Him. **EVENTUALLY** Allah was only applied to the Supreme Deity. "In any case it is an extremely important fact that Muhammad did not find it necessary to introduce an altogether novel deity, but contented himself with ridding **the HEATHEN Allah** of his companions subjecting him to a kind of dogmatic purification ... Had he not been accustomed from his youth to the idea of Allah as the Supreme God, in particular of Mecca, it may well be doubted whether he would ever have come forward as the preacher of Monotheism." (Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not A Muslim* [Prometheus Books, Amherst NY, 1995], pp. 39-40, 42; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Gerhard Nehls writes:

Who was Hubal?

In Chapter 2 we had mentioned Hubal who was considered the god of the Ka'ba before the time of Muhammad. What does the name mean? It cannot be explained from the Arabic language (ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ISLAM by Gibb and Kramers). In his book "Specimen Historicae Arabum" the author (Pocock) **suggests that the name might well have been derived from ha-Baal**. The old Hebrew and Arabic written languages had no vowels, so this would have been one of many common changes (e.g. one can read Mohamed, Muhammad, Muhammed, Mahomet etc.).

Interesting is the name H_UB_{AA}L (in Arabic and Hebrew script the vowels were not noted). **This shows a very suspicious connection to the Hebrew H_AB_{AA}L (= the Baal)**. As we all know this was an idol mentioned in the Bible (Num. 25:3, Hosea 9:10, Deut. 4:3, Josh. 22:17 and Ps. 106:28-29). Where was Baal worshipped? **In Moab!** It was the "god of fertility". Amr ibn Luhaiy brought Hubal from Moab to Arabia.

The name 'Allah' (from 'al-Ilah' - the god or 'al-Liah' = the one worshipped) was well used in pre-Islamic times. **It was rather a title than a name and, was used for a diversity of deities.** As we shall see later, **an idol called Hubal was addressed as Allah. Muhammad's grandfather reportedly prayed to Hubal and addressed him as Allah.** The deities al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat were called "the daughters of Allah" (Surah 53:19). "Allah was viewed, already before Muhammad, as the Lord of the Ka'ba, **while, if not surely, but very probably, this sanctuary was devoted to Hubal, whose image was placed inside**" (RESTE ARABISCHEN HEIDENTHUMS, p. 221 by J. Wellhausen). "While the rituals performed are still addressed to the respective deities, Allah is seen as the creator, the father and with that the superior Lord. But he is viewed to be too general, neutral and impersonal a Lord" (ibid p. 219). **"Allah became the Islamic substitute for any idol"** (ibid p. 85).

"It is presupposed by Muhammad and admitted by his opponents, that Allah is the Lord of the Ka'ba. **Is perhaps the Allah of Mecca Hubal? In other words, was Hubal called Allah in Mecca as Jahweh was called Elohim**

in Israel?", asks J. Wellhausen (ibid p. 75). This becomes even more likely when we realize that the polytheists of Arabia recognized Allah as creator (Surahs 23:84-89; 29:61), and swore by him (Surah 6:109). **So the name Allah must at first have been a title. "At first Allah was the title used within each individual tribe to address its tribal deity instead of its proper name.** All said 'Allah', but each one had its own deity in mind. The expression 'the god' (al-ilah), which became the only usage, became the bridge to the concept of an identical god which all tribes had in common (J. Wellhausen, p. 218)". (Source: <http://answering-islam.org/Nehls/tt1/tt5.html>; emphasis ours)

The next set of quotes lend support to Nehls' claim regarding Allah being used as a title applicable to the particular deity worshiped by a specific tribe or group:

But the vague notion of Supreme (NOT SOLE) divinity which Allah seems to have connoted in Meccan religion was to BECOME both universal and transcendental; it was to be turned by the Kur'anic preaching, into the affirmation of the living God, the Exalted One. (*Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1960, p. 406; capital emphasis ours)

But though the name [Allah] was the same for the Meccans and for Muhammad, **their conceptions of the NATURE of the bearer of the name must have DIFFERED WIDELY.** (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1965, p. 34; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Certain tribes of the Hejaz also invoked him, as is shown at the end of surah 29. However, the same surah illustrates that Allah, the God of Qur'anic preaching, has nothing in common **with ANY SIMILARLY NAMED DIVINITY.** (*Encyclopedia of Religion*, 1987, p. 27; bold and capital emphasis ours)

Both the concept of a Supreme God and the Arabian term [Allah] have been shown to be familiar to the Arabs in Mohammed's time. What Mohammed did was to give a NEW and fuller content to the concept, TO PURIFY IT FROM ELEMENTS OF POLYTHEISM WHICH CLUSTERED AROUND IT. (H.A.R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey* [Oxford University Press, London 1961], p. 54; capital emphasis ours)

(Note: The preceding citations were taken from Dr. Jamal Badawi's debate with Dr. Robert Morey on November 9, 1996 titled "Is Allah of the Quran the one true and universal God?" (*) Astonishingly, Dr. Badawi tried to use these quotes to offset Morey's claim that Allah was a pagan deity, despite the fact that these citations suggest otherwise!)

One writer goes so far as to apply Baal to the name Hubal. Speaking of the Kabah, Barnaby Rogerson writes:

Inside this holy of holies are stored all manner of sacred objects and images. These are said to include an icon of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child and a portrait of the Prophet Abraham. But the shrine is dominated by a representation of the war god Baal Hubal, who watches over the city's political destiny. At times of trouble the city elders can seek his advice by casting a quiver of divinatory arrows before idols and reading the future from the answers they give. (Rogerson, *The Prophet Muhammad - A Biography* [HiddenSpring, An Imprint of Pauline Press, Mahwah, NJ 2003], p. 15; underline emphasis ours)

And:

The statue of the Syrian war god Hubal was hauled away, as were the divination arrows that the Quraysh had been wont to throw before the statue. (Ibid., p. 190; underline emphasis ours)

Noted Christian Apologist John Gilchrist states:

In the sixth century after Christ, Mecca (pronounced Makkah in Arabic) was hardly known to the outside world but it was the commercial and religious centre of Arabia. Although the Arabs were a divided people, broken up into various tribes who were constantly at war with each other, the fairs at the city served to attract many of them and whatever unity existed among them was generated and expressed through these annual get-togethers. The focal point of attention was the Ka'aba (Arabic for "cube"), a shrine in the centre of the city containing over three hundred idols, chief of whom was the god Hubal (*a probable derivation from the ancient high-god Ba'al, so often spoken of as the chief object of worship of the pagan nations around Israel in the Bible*). The various tribes

came to Mecca to worship their gods and take part in the various poetical contests that were arranged at the fairs. The composition of poetry was a favourite literary pastime of the Arabs and many shu'ara (poets, singular: sha'ir) competed at these contests. (John Gilchrist, *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*, p. 11; [online edition](#))

We next turn to the Holy Bible to show that the nations mentioned in Psalm 83, as well as in the Muslim sources, such as Edomites, Syrians, Amalekites, Moabites and the Midianites, all worshiped Baal:

"When Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to commit sexual immorality **with the daughters of Moab. And these women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods; and then the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor.** And the anger of the Lord flared up against Israel. And the Lord said to Moses, 'Arrest all the leaders of the people, and hang them up before the Lord in broad daylight, so that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel.' So Moses said to the judges of Israelites, 'Each of you must execute those of his men **who were joined to Baal-peor.**'" Numbers 25:1-5 NET Bible

"The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God **and served the Baals and the Asherahs.** The anger of the LORD burned against Israel so that he sold them into the hands of Cushan-Rishathaim **king of Aram Naharaim**, to whom the Israelites were subject for eight years. But when they cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, who saved them. The Spirit of the LORD came upon him, so that he became Israel's judge and went to war. The LORD gave Cushan-Rishathaim **king of Aram** into the hands of Othniel, who overpowered him." Judges 3:7-10

"Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD. They served **the Baals** and the Ashtoreths, **and the gods of Aram**, the gods of Sidon, **the gods of Moab**, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the LORD and no longer served him." Judges 10:6

Aram is the Biblical name for what is otherwise known as Syria:

"He put garrisons in **the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute.** The LORD gave David victory wherever he went... **EDOM and Moab**, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah." 2 Samuel 8:6, 12

(In those days the LORD began to send **Rezin king of Aram** and Pekah son of Remaliah against Judah) ... In the seventeenth year of Pekah son of Remaliah, Ahaz son of Jotham king of Judah began to reign. Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even sacrificed his son in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. **Then Rezin king of Aram** and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem and besieged Ahaz, but they could not overpower him. At that time, **Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram by driving out the men of Judah. EDOMITES then moved into Elath and have lived there to this day.** Ahaz sent messengers to say to Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria, 'I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me.' And Ahaz took the silver and gold found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace and sent it as a gift to the king of Assyria. The king of Assyria complied **by attacking Damascus and capturing it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and put Rezin to death.**" 2 Kings 15:37, 16:1-9

"When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. Now the house of David was told, '**Aram has allied itself with Ephraim**'; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind. Then the LORD said to Isaiah, 'Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Washerman's Field. Say to him, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood-because of the fierce anger of Rezin **and Aram** and of the son of Remaliah. **Aram**, Ephraim and Remaliah's son have plotted your ruin, saying, 'Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among

ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it'; Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'It will not take place, it will not happen, **for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin**. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people. The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah's son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'"" Isaiah 7:1-9

These passages also show that Esau's descendents, the Edomites, settled in Aram. The Amalekites were also descendents of Esau who settled in Seir, another descendent of Esau:

"Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, **who bore him Amalek**. These were grandsons of Esau's wife Adah ... These were the chiefs among Esau's descendants: The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: Chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam **and Amalek**. These were the chiefs descended from Eliphaz **in Edom**; they were grandsons of Adah ... **These were the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these were their chiefs. These were the sons of Seir the Horite**, who were living in the region: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. **These sons of Seir in Edom were Horite chiefs.**" Genesis 36:12, 15-16, 19-21

"The men whose names were listed came in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. They attacked the Hamites in their dwellings and also the Meunites who were there and completely destroyed them, as is evident to this day. Then they settled in their place, because there was pasture for their flocks. And five hundred of these Simeonites, led by Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi, **invaded the hill country of Seir. They killed the remaining Amalekites who had escaped, and they have lived there to this day.**" 1 Chronicles 4:41-43

What this essentially means is that these nations all worshiped the false god Baal.

And now to summarize the data:

1. According to the Bible, the Ishmaelites were not worshiping Yahweh God.
2. Their alliance with nations that worshiped Baal suggests that they were also worshiping the false god Baal.
3. Both Muslim and non-Muslim sources state that Hubal was recognized as the chief presiding deity of the Kabah.
4. Muhammad's grandfather worshiped Hubal, and even prayed to Allah while facing Hubal's idol.
5. The Muslim sources claim that Hubal was brought to Mecca from Syria due to the influence of the Moabites and/or the Amalekites.
6. These nations worshiped Baal which demonstrates that Hubal is actually the Arabic form of Hebrew Ha Baal or the Baal.

The foregoing seriously damages the Muslim claim regarding Allah in pre-Islamic times being the same God of Abraham. The assertion that the pre-Islamic Ishmaelites worshiped the same God cannot be maintained in light of the Psalm's clear statement that they, along with a host of other pagan nations, hated and opposed Yahweh and his covenant people Israel. The evidence linking Allah with Hubal implies this as well. Hence, if the Muslim contention that the Meccan Arabs are Ishmaelites is correct, then the god of Mecca, the Allah of pre-Islamic Arabia, is actually the false god Baal.

What makes this more interesting is that one modern Muslim scholar acknowledges that Hubal was the name for the moon god:

Among the many deities that the Arabs worshiped in and around the Ka'bah were the god Hubal and the three goddesses Al-lat, al-'Uzza, and Manat. Hubal was originally a moon god, and perhaps also a rain god, as *hubal* means "vapor." Al-lat was perhaps a feminine form of Allah, whose name simply means the goddess...

While the Arabs professed *Allah*, an Arabic word meaning "the God," to be the supreme deity, they did not worship him, nor did he play an active role in their lives... (Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Islam: Faith and History* [Oneworld Publications, Oxford England, 2004], p. 15; underline emphasis ours)

Ayoub's comments that the Arabs didn't worship Allah suggest that they viewed Allah as being too distant and disinterested in their daily affairs to be bothered with. Yet, one can also understand the Arabs' disinterest in Allah, in contrast to their worship of Hubal, to mean that Allah was a less important deity than Hubal. This would basically imply that Allah was not considered to be the supreme deity, contrary to Ayoub's claims. More importantly, if Allah was a name for Hubal then this means that Allah was indeed a title given to the moon deity in pre-Islamic times!

Whatever the scenario, the data leaves us with the inescapable conclusion that both the Ishmaelites and the Meccan Arabs did not worship Yahweh, falsifying the Quranic claim that Ishmael's descendants worshiped the true God, albeit along with a host of other gods. It may have been the case that early in their history the Ishmaelites worshiped Yahweh, but later on they abandoned the true God for a false god.

Discussion of Evidence That Suggests Hubal is a god distinct from Allah

The following verse in the Quran seems to call into question Hubal being Allah.

Will ye cry unto **Baal** and forsake the Best of creators, Allah, your Lord and Lord of your forefathers? S. 37:125-126 Pickthall

Here, the author of the Quran distinguishes Allah from Baal which seems to imply that they are not one and the same entity. A couple of responses are in order. First, even though the text distinguishes Baal from Allah, it says nothing about HU-bal. In fact, the word Hubal never appears in the Quran. It seems that the author was unaware that Hubal and Baal were actually one and the same entity. The surrounding context seems to support this:

And lo! Elias was of those sent (to warn), When he said unto his folk: Will ye not ward off (evil)? Will ye cry unto Baal and forsake the Best of creators, Allah, your Lord and Lord of your forefathers? But they denied him, so they surely will be haled forth (to the doom) Save single-minded slaves of Allah. And we left for him among the later folk (the salutation): Peace be unto Elias! Lo! thus do We reward the good. Lo! he is one of our believing slaves. S. 37:123-132 Pickthall

Since this is referring to the time of Elijah, presumably during his showdown with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18), it may be that the author of the Quran didn't realize that the Baal of Elijah's day was none other than the Hubal worshiped at Mecca. Second, we are focusing on the identity of the pre-Islamic Allah, the Allah worshiped by the pagans prior to the advent of Islam. Hence, it is quite possible that through Muhammad's influence Allah was transformed from a pagan high god to the true universal God worshiped by Jews and Christians. In other words, Muhammad tried to package Allah as a distinct Being from the false gods such as Hubal/Baal, purifying the pre-Islamic Allah from all pagan elements. See the above citations taken from Dr. Jamal Badawi which essentially say the same thing.

Muhammad did something similar with the term *Rahman*. The Meccans were taken aback by the use of this name and actually thought that Muhammad was speaking of a different deity from Allah:

Thus We have sent thee among a nation before which other nations have passed away, to recite to them that We have revealed to thee; and yet they disbelieve in the All-merciful. Say: 'He is my Lord -- there is no god but He. In Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn.' S. 13:30 A.J. Arberry

When the unbelievers behold thee, they take thee only for mockery: 'Ha, is this the one who makes mention of your gods?' Yet they in the Remembrance of the All-merciful are unbelievers ... Say: 'Who shall guard you by

night and in the daytime from the All-merciful?' Nay, but from the Remembrance of their Lord they are turning away. S. 21:36, 42 Arberry

who created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days, then sat Himself upon the Throne, the All-compassionate: ask any informed of Him! But when they are told, 'Bow yourselves to the All-Merciful,' they say, 'And what is the All-Merciful? Shall we bow ourselves to what thou biddest us?' And it increases them in aversion. S. 25:59-60 A.J. Arberry

Ibn Kathir notes:

Then Allah rebukes the idolators who prostrate to idols and rivals instead of Allah ...

<And when it is said to them: "Prostrate yourselves to Ar-Rahman!" They say: "And what is Ar-Rahman?">

meaning: we do not know Ar-Rahman. They did not like to call Allah by His name Ar-Rahman (the Most Gracious), as they objected on the day of (the treaty of) Hudaibiyyah, when the Prophet told the scribe ...

((Write: "In the name of Allah, Ar-Rahman (the Most Gracious), Ar-Rahim (the Most Merciful)."))

They said, "We do not know Ar-Rahman or Ar-Rahim. Write what you use to write: 'Bismika Allahumma (in your name, O Allah).'" So Allah revealed the words ...

<Say: "Invoke Allah or invoke Ar-Rahman, by whatever name you invoke Him (it is the same), for to Him belong the Best Names"> (17:110).

meaning, he is Allah and He is the Most Gracious. And in this Ayah, Allah said ...

<And when it is said to them: "Prostrate yourselves to Ar-Rahman!" They say: "And what is the Ar-Rahman?">

meaning: we do not know or approve of this Name. (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged) Volume 7 (Surat An-Nur to Surat Al-Ahzab, Verse 50)*, abridged by a group of scholars under the supervision of Shaykh Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri [Darussalam Publishers & Distributors, Riyadh, Houston, New York, London, Lahore; First Edition: August 2000], p. 192)

Regarding 17:110, Ibn Kathir writes:

Allah says ...

<Say> O Muhammad, to these idolators who deny that Allah possesses the attribute of mercy and refuse to call Him Ar-Rahman ...

<Invoke Allah or invoke Ar-Rahman (the Most Gracious), by whatever name you invoke Him (it is the same), for to Him belong the Best Names.>

meaning, there is no difference between calling on Him as Allah or calling on Him as Ar-Rahman, because He has the Most Beautiful Names ...

Makhul reported that one of the idolators heard the Prophet saying when he was prostrating: "O Most Gracious, O Most Merciful." The idolator said, he claims to pray to One, but he is praying to two! Then Allah revealed this Ayah. This was also narrated from Ibn 'Abbas, and by Ibn Jarir. (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged) Volume 6 (Surat Al-Isra', verse 39 To the end of Surat Al-Mu'minun)*, First edition, July 2000, pp. 104-105; underlined emphasis ours)

And regarding the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Ibn Kathir mentions:

<Write: In the Name of Allah, Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim.> Suhayl bin `Amr said, '**As for Ar-Rahman, by Allah, I DO NOT KNOW WHAT IT MEANS.** So write: By Your Name, O Allah, as you used to write previously.'

The Muslims said, 'By Allah, we will not write except: By the Name of Allah, Ar-Rahman, Ar-Rahim.' The Prophet said, <Write: "In Your Name O Allah." (Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged) Volume 9 (Surat Al-Jathiyah to the end of Surat Al-Munafiqun), First edition, September, 2000, p. 163; [online edition](#); bold emphasis ours)

According to some sources *Rahman* was used as a name for a pagan deity:

Nöldeke thinks Mohammed was in doubt as to which name he would select for the supreme being and that he thought of adopting *Er-Rahman*, the merciful, as the proper name of God in place of Allah, because that was already used by the heathen. *Rahmana* was a favorite Hebrew name for God in the Talmudic period and in use among the Jews of Arabia.¹ On the Christian monuments found by Dr. Edward Glaser in Yemen, Allah is also mentioned. The Sirwah inscription (A.D. 542) opens with the words: "In the power of the All-merciful and His Messiah and the Holy Ghost,"² which shows that, at least in Yemen, Arabian Christians were not in error regarding the persons of the Trinity. One other term often used for Allah we will have occasion to study later. It is the word *Es-Samad* [the Eternal], and seems to come from the same root as *Samood*, the name of an idol of the tribe of 'Ad and mentioned in the poem of Yezid bin Sa'ad.³ Hobal, the Chief god of the Kaaba (and whom Dozy identifies with Baal),¹ is, strange to say, not mentioned in the Koran. Perhaps he was at this period already identified by the Meccans with Allah. This would explain Mohammed's silence on the subject. (Samuel Zwemer, [The Moslem Doctrine of God](#), pp. 27-28; underlined emphasis ours)

Other deities in the Arabian peninsula included al-Rahman and al-Hajar al-Aswad. Al-Rahman was the name of an ancient deity in southern Arabia. Muhammad used the name of this deity, which means "merciful," 169 times in the Qur'an. With the exception of Allah, it appears in the Qur'an more than any other descriptive term for Allah. (George Braswell, *Islam*, p. 44; underlined emphasis ours)

Al-Rahman

The name of an ancient deity in southern Arabia. Muhammad is said to have preferred this name to the name "Allah." He uses it 169 times in the Quran. With the exception of the name "Allah", the name "Al-Rahman" appears more times than any other name because Jews and Christians would have accepted it as an alternate name for Allah. *Rahmana* was a favorite Hebrew name for God in the Talmudic period and was frequently used by the Arabian Jews. Christians in Arabia also used the name "Rahman" to refer to the God of the Bible. A pre-Islamic inscription found in Yemen in AD 542 opens with the words: "In the power of the Al-Rahman and His Messiah and the Holy Spirit." In the Coptic Museum in Egypt, there are similar inscriptions. ([Reach Out to the Muslim World](#), Vol. 6, No. 3&4 [Horizons International, Box 18478, Boulder, Co. 80308-1478; 1993], p. 8)

Other deities in the Arabian Peninsula included al-Rahman and Hajar-al-Aswad. Al-Rahman was the name of an ancient deity in southern Arabia. Muhammad used the name of this deity, which means "merciful," 169 times in the Qur'an. ([Islam and Christianity - Part 4](#))

The word *Rahman-an* is especially significant because its northern equivalent, *al-Rahman*, became a later prominent attribute of Allah and one of His names in the Koran and in Islamic theology. Surah nineteen is dominated by al-Rahman. Though used in the inscription for the Christian God, yet the word is evidently borrowed from the name of the older South Arabian deities. *Al-Rahim* (the compassionate) also occurs as the name of a deity (RHM) in pre-Islamic and Sabeian inscriptions. Another South Arabic inscription uses, *kufr*, association in the sense of polytheism. In the same inscription occurs the technical term denoting unbelief, *KFR*, as in North Arabic. (Hitti, *History of Islam*, p. 105)

The fact is that even 'Allah's' most frequently used title, ar-Rahman (the Merciful) was known in South Arabia well before the advent of Islam, and signified a moon-god, whom Muhammed even occasionally confused with or used as a substitute for 'Allah'. The Koran mentions ar-Rahman occasionally, for example in sura 43:19, which most translators have renamed as God or Allah, since they, as Muhammed, found no difference between these two South Arabian moon-gods.

The name ar-Rahman had even been used by several Arabian prophets before Muhammed, and this deity seemed to have signified a similar, if not the same, position as Allah in Mecca. Therefore we cannot accept the unilateral

acceptance of 'Allah' as the biblical High God, any more than the Persian high god Ahura Mazda or the Norse Odin. ([The Nature of Islam: The Beginning](#))

According to the Koran, 'Allah' is one and no other god can be associated with him. This concept was most likely adopted from the South Arabian moon-god ar-Rahman (the Merciful), whose name was later adopted by Muslims as one of 'Allah's' titles. C. C. Torrey states:

The South Arabian inscriptions have brought to light a highly interesting parallel. In a number of them there is mention of the God, who is styled 'the Rahman' (Merciful). A monument in the British Museum... is especially remarkable. Here we find clearly indicated the doctrines of the divine forgiveness of sins, the acceptance of sacrifice, the contrast between this world and the next, and the evil of 'associating' other deities with the Rahman. ([What is Islam? Part III.](#))

This may account for the confusion of some of Muhammad's contemporaries in relation to the name *Rahman* being applied to Allah. The pagan Meccans may have been aware that *Rahman* referred to a different deity and because of this they were not accustomed to using it for Allah.

Just as one Muslim chronicler, Ibn Sa'd, noted:

... The Quraysh sent al-Nadr Ibn al-Harith Ibn 'Alqamah and 'Uqbah Ibn Abi Mu'ayt and others to the Jews of Yathrib and told them to ask them (Jews): We have come to you because a great affair has taken place amidst us. There is an humble orphan who makes a big claim, considering himself to be **the messenger of al-Rahman, while we do not know any al-Rahman except the Rahman of al-Yamamah** ... (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab Al-Tabaqat Al-Kabir*, english translation by S. Moinul Haq, M.A., PH.D assisted by H.K. Ghazanfar M.A. [Kitab Bhavan Exporters & Importers, 1784 Kalan Mahal, Daryaganj, New Delhi- 110 002 India], Volume I, parts I & II, p. 189; bold emphasis ours)

Interestingly, these citations provide evidence that Muhammad assimilated different attributes and conceptions of the gods together to form his own conception of the Deity. The pagan Arabs made a similar accusation against him:

What! makes he the gods a single God? A strange thing is this, to be sure! And the chief persons of them break forth, saying: Go and steadily adhere to your gods; this is most surely a thing sought after. S. 38:5-6 Shakir

Hence, even if the Quranic mention of Baal turns out to be a reference to Hubal, this would only show that Muhammad disassociated Allah from Hubal by turning the former into the true universal God.

Interestingly, one writer actually believes that some Muslims who were still attached to their gods took their names and turned them into specific attributes of Allah:

Some of these honorifics bear a close linguistic relationship with the names of pagan deities, and to account for this the Muslims maintained that the pagans perversely named their idols after the titles used from earliest times for the one true God (Sale, 1886, p. 127). Thus Allat was derived from Allah; Manat from Mannan, 'Bountiful'; Jibt from Jabbar, 'Preserver'; and so on.

On the other hand, it might be suggested that the early Muslims, many of whom still retained a reverence for their idol gods, may well have sought to perpetuate the names of their deities by concealing them in the so-called 'most excellent names' bestowed upon Allah. By this strange conversion the names of the many heathen deities could have survived within the pale of Islam.

Thus Wadd, the moon-god, was assimilated and survived in al-Wadud, 'the Loving'; Munim, worshiped in north Arabia, survives as al-Mani, 'the Withholder'; Salm, a deity of Tayma, in al-Salaam, 'the Peace'; Kaus or Kayis, regarded as the consort of Manat, is retained in al-Kawi, 'the Strong'; Aziz of north Arabia is preserved unchanged as al-Aziz, 'the Mighty'. The pre-Islamic designations of God, al-Rahman, 'the Merciful', and al-Rahim, 'the Compassionate', remain conspicuous in Islam. (Walker, *Foundations of Islam*, p. 43)

Thus, ar-Rahman wasn't the only title used for a pagan deity which was then applied to Allah; several of the other attributes of Allah may well have been at one time names of pagan gods which were transferred over to Islam's deity as well! Walker's interpretation is certainly more probable than the anachronistic explanation of the Muslims that is reported by Sale. This demonstrates the plausibility of Muhammad having taken the title given to Hubal, specifically the name Allah, and transforming it into the proper name of the one true universal God, thereby forever disassociating the name from Hubal.

Whatever the case may be, the fact remains that Surah 37:125 tells us nothing about the identity of Allah *in pre-Islamic times*.

The following citation also seems to cast doubt on Hubal being Allah:

Narrated Al-Bara:

We faced the pagans on that day (of the battle of Uhud) and the Prophet placed a batch of archers (at a special place) and appointed 'Abdullah (bin Jubair) as their commander and said, "Do not leave this place; and if you should see us conquering the enemy, do not leave this place, and if you should see them conquering us, do not (come to) help us," So, when we faced the enemy, they took to their heel till I saw their women running towards the mountain, lifting up their clothes from their legs, revealing their leg-bangles. The Muslims started saying, "The booty, the booty!" 'Abdullah bin Jubair said, "The Prophet had taken a firm promise from me not to leave this place." But his companions refused (to stay). So when they refused (to stay there), (Allah) confused them so that they could not know where to go, and they suffered seventy casualties. Abu Sufyan ascended a high place and said, "Is Muhammad present amongst the people?" The Prophet said, "Do not answer him." Abu Sufyan said, "Is the son of Abu Quhafa present among the people?" The Prophet said, "Do not answer him." Abu Sufyan said, "Is the son of Al-Khattab amongst the people?" He then added, "All these people have been killed, for, were they alive, they would have replied." On that, 'Umar could not help saying, "You are a liar, O enemy of Allah! Allah has kept what will make you unhappy." Abu Sufyan said, **"Superior may be Hubal!"** On that the Prophet said (to his companions), "Reply to him." They asked, "What may we say?" He said, **"Say: Allah is More Elevated and More Majestic!"** Abu Sufyan said, "We have (the idol) Al-'Uzza, whereas you have no 'Uzza!" The Prophet said (to his companions), "Reply to him." They said, "What may we say?" The Prophet said, "Say: Allah is our Helper and you have no helper." Abu Sufyan said, "(This) day compensates for our loss at Badr and (in) the battle (the victory) is always undecided and shared in turns by the belligerents. You will see some of your dead men mutilated, but neither did I urge this action, nor am I sorry for it." Narrated Jabir: Some people took wine in the morning of the day of Uhud and were then killed as martyrs. (*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Volume 5, Book 59, Number 375)

Unlike the verse in the Quran, this one does mention Hubal by name and suggests that he was distinct from Allah. Again, Muhammad transforming Allah from a pagan deity into the sole universal God, a transformation which was different from any similarly named deity, can account for why Sufyan viewed Hubal as a different god altogether.

Furthermore, this tradition actually poses problems for the Muslims since it implies that the pagans such as Abu Sufyan did not view Allah as the supreme god, but one of many rival gods. Sufyan attributes his victory over Muhammad and his god to Hubal and Uzza, suggesting that at least in his mind these gods were equal, if not superior, to Allah. Sufyan obviously felt that Allah could be challenged and defeated, which means that these pagans didn't see Allah as the unrivaled and supreme Deity as both the Quran and Islamic traditions claim.

If this is so, then the Muslim assertion that Allah was not just one of many pagan deities worshiped by the Meccans is doubtful. The Pagans did view Allah as another deity.

In conclusion, we need to emphasize that these facts remain. The OT explicitly denies the Muslim assertion that the pre-Islamic Ishmaelites knew and worshiped the true God and that their only problem was that they associated other gods with him. The data conclusively shows that as the centuries unfolded the Ishmaelites forsook the God of their ancestors Abraham and Jacob, Yahweh Elohim, for the worship of some false god. The

false god whom they worshiped as the true God was quite possibly Baal. The data also shows that Hubal was the high god worshiped at Mecca, which supports the view that he was the Allah of pre-Islamic times.

We started out with a quotation from the Psalms identifying the Ishmaelites as enemies of God. Even though the thesis of this paper was argued on the basis of the assumption that the Meccans are Ishmaelites the conclusion does not depend on this assumption. Most of the quotations we have cited to support our argument do not mention Ishmaelites at all.

The Biblical and historical evidence shows that the Moabites worshiped Baal. The pre-Islamic and Muslim sources show (a) that the Meccans took over the idol Hubal from the Moabites and (b) that Allah and Hubal are actually identical. Thus, whether the Meccans are Ishmaelites or not, the evidence is still strong and sufficient to conclude that Muhammad's Allah is actually Hubal, i.e. the Baal of the Moabites and thus not the God of the Bible. Muhammad incorporated the characteristics and names of various other gods into his new monotheistic message about Allah, but he apparently started the construction of Allah with Hubal, the chief god of the Meccans.

Further readings

[Ba'al, Hubal, and Allah](#)

[Did the Meccans Believe in Allah as the Most High?](#)

[Ar-Rahman of the Quran: A Pagan Deity or the God of the Bible?](#)

ISLAM HAS NO FATHER

by [Silas](#)

INTRODUCTION

As I've studied the spiritual power behind Islam and wondered how this spiritual power influenced Muhammad's theology, a well known difference between Islam's god and Christianity's God kept coming to mind. That difference is that Islam's god is never described or known as "Father", but in both Christianity and Judaism, God is known as Father.

I thought about this not just from a mere doctrinal point of view, (anyone familiar with basic Islam knows that it has no concept of God as Father), but rather from a spiritual and relational point of view. I realized something about Muhammad's relationship: **the spiritual power behind Islam never gave Muhammad the intimate love that a father gives his son.** That is why Muhammad never called that spiritual power "father". He simply did not know it that way. The relationship between Muhammad and his god was one of a slave to his master, with obedience, rather than love, being the primary impulse. Below is how Muhammad described this relationship.

Narrated 'Umar:

I heard the Prophet saying, "Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a Slave. So, call me the Slave of Allah and His Apostle." [1]

(NOTE 1: Muhammad did talk about loving Allah, and about Allah's love. But Allah's love is predicated upon the Muslim's performance and obedience, not on their relationship. More on that later.)

(NOTE 2: I know the word "Allah" means God in Arabic and that Arabic Christians use the word "Allah" for God. However, when I use the word, "Allah", I am specifically referring to the god of Islam).

Muhammad ascribed many names to Allah and these names reveal Allah's character. As examples there are Al Muntaqim - The Avenger, Ar-Raof - The Compassionate, and Ar-Razzaq - The Provider. You can search through Allah's 99 names (some Muslims state that Allah has more names) and you'll find many characteristics that a good father should have. [2] But one name is missing that is one of the most wonderful of God's names, and that is "Father".

Why is this name missing? Why isn't Islam's god a loving father like Judaism's and Christianity's? Why the gaping hole in Muhammad's spirituality? After all, Muhammad believed in the validity of Judaism and Christianity, their teachings and their books, [3] but his Quran and theology conspicuously lack a God who is a loving Father. Why couldn't the spiritual power that drove Muhammad give him the tender love that the God of the Bible gave His people? **Because the spiritual being that Muhammad believed to be God was unable to be a loving father to Muhammad.** Islam's god is indeed a master, and he can be a kind and forgiving master, but he can not deliver the goods as a God of infinite mercy and love. And this is why there is a dearth of description of Allah being a loving god in the Quran. **Because it is not in Islam's god's nature to be a father.**

Below is a comment from a Muslim web site on Islam's concept of God

There is nothing like male Allah or female Allah. Allah has no gender. If you add the word 'father' to 'God' it becomes 'God-father'. God-father means someone who is a guardian. There is no word like 'Allah-Abba' or 'Allah-father'. [4]

Think about it. A good father loves his children, those whom he created. He is invested in them. He will care for them, provide for them, guide them, and love them intimately. He cherishes his children, is proud of them when they do well, and disciplines them when they lag. His commitment to his children exceeds that of a coach for his players, that of a boss for his workers, or that of a master for his slave. The slave will never hold the treasured position in the father's heart that a child holds. And it is this type of love relationship that is lacking in Islam.

However, we see this love expressed by Judaism's and Christianity's God. God was more to His people than a master who required obedience. He was a Shepherd for His people. He went beyond their limitations and sinfulness and gave them His love. We see a Father's love given in both Judaism and Christianity, but never in Islam.

People say love makes the world go round. Why is love lacking in

SCRIPTURES THAT SHOW THAT GOD IS A FATHER

Let's take a look at the groundwork that Judaism and Christianity lay regarding God as Father. The God of the Bible is indeed a Father to His people. From both the Old and New Testament Scriptures we see God revealing and describing Himself as a Father. Here are some examples taken from the New International Version. [5]

1) Deut. 32:6

Is this the way you repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?

2) Psalms 2:7

I will proclaim the decree of the LORD : He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father.

3) Isaiah 63:16

But you are our Father, though Abraham does not know us or Israel acknowledge us; you, O LORD, are our Father, our Redeemer from of old is your name.

4) Matthew 6:9

"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,'"

5) John 20:17

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

6) Romans 8:15

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

On the other hand, the Quran denies God's Fatherhood:

Sura 5:18

And (both) the Jews and the Christians say: "We are the children of Allah and His loved ones." Say: "Why then does He punish you for your sins?" Nay, you are but human beings, of those He has created, He forgives whom He wills and He punishes whom He wills. And to Allah belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and to Him is the return (of all). [6]

You can see from the Quranic verse above that Muhammad refused to accept Christians and Jews as God's children because He disciplined them. However, both the Old and New Testaments Bible teach that a loving father disciplines his children.

Hebrews 12:7-11

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Jeremiah 31:18, 19

"I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the LORD my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'"

Muhammad grew up without a father. His father died before his birth, his mother died when he was six years old. Muhammad lived first with his grandfather and then mostly with his uncle. It may be that he was not disciplined by his uncle who raised him. If that was the case, then he missed out on a valuable aspect of the father-relationship. Fathers who love their children discipline them. God loves His people and He does indeed discipline them for their own good!

MUHAMMAD'S INTIMACY WITH THE SPIRIT

Muhammad was intimate with the spiritual power that he encountered, first in a cave, but this intimacy was not a familial intimacy. It was not even close. Let's examine Muhammad's first encounter with a spiritual force that would lead him, guide him, and instruct him for the rest of his life. What emotions did this up-close and personal introduction produce in Muhammad? In what state did it leave Muhammad? Here is the story...

One day Muhammad was praying and mediating in a cave when a spirit came upon him. It seized Muhammad and squeezed and choked him. Muhammad was terrified, he was scared out of his wits. This spirit demanded that Muhammad "recite" (or read) but Muhammad replied that he didn't know what to recite. This happened three times. Finally, out of fear for his life, Muhammad asked the spirit "what shall I recite?" Then the spirit told him the first verses of the Quran, Sura 96:1-5. [7]

Here are some quotes, from the earliest Islamic sources, written exclusively by devout Muslim scholars. Take your time and read them through. I encourage you to read them a second time through. As you read, read in-between the lines. What do you learn about Allah's character?

...The angel came to him in it and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, "I do not know how to read." (The Prophet added), "The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it anymore. He

then released me and again asked me to read, and I replied, "I do not know how to read," whereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it anymore. He then released me and asked me again to read, but again I replied, "I do not know how to read (or, what shall I read?)." Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me and then released me and said, "Read: In the Name of your Lord, Who has created (all that exists). Has created man from a clot. Read and Your Lord is Most Generous...up to..... ..that which he knew not."

Then Allah's Apostle returned with the Inspiration, his neck muscles twitching with terror till he entered upon Khadija and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was over and then he said, "O Khadija, what is wrong with me?"

...But after a few days Waraqa died and the Divine Inspiration was also paused for a while **and the Prophet became so sad as we have heard that he intended several times to throw himself from the tops of high mountains** and every time he went up the top of a mountain in order to throw himself down, Gabriel would appear before him and say, "O Muhammad! You are indeed Allah's Apostle in truth" whereupon his heart would become quiet and he would calm down and would return home. And whenever the period of the coming of the inspiration used to become long, he would do as before, but when he used to reach the top of a mountain, Gabriel would appear before him and say to him what he had said before....(Sahih al-Bukhari, volume 9, #111).

"O Khadija, I see light and hear sounds and I fear I am mad". [8]

"So I read it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep, and it was though these words were written on my heart. (Tabari: Now none of God's creatures was more hateful to me than an (ecstatic) poet or a man possessed: I could not even look at them. I thought, Woe is me poet or possessed - Never shall Quraysh say this of me! I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest. So I went forth to do so and then) when I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying "O Muhammad! thou are the apostle of God and I am Gabriel." [9]

These quotes show us that Muhammad was suicidal and depressed because of his first intimate experience with this spirit (who supposedly represented Allah). He believed that he had become demon possessed or had gone mad. He quickly attempted suicide. Once the spirit successfully stopped him, Muhammad lived in depression and continued to attempt suicide, only to be stopped by the spirit yet again. He suffered from a mental disease. Eventually, after about 3 years, Muhammad believed the words of this spirit and thought of himself as an apostle. (For an in-depth look at Muhammad's suicide attempts see [this article](#).)

What does this experience tell us about the nature of Muhammad's god? Where was the comfort that Mary was comforted with (Luke 1:30-38)? Where was the confidence and accompanying miracles that Moses performed after he dialoged with God (Exodus 3 & 4)? Where was the intimacy that God gave to Jesus at His baptism in Matthew (3:16, 17)? It was nowhere to be found.

Would a loving God freak-out his chosen man and allow him to become confused, full of doubt, and depressed, all the while letting him to swim in the pool of suicide? The God of the Bible, the Father, never allowed his chosen men to act in such a manner. Instead, the Father strengthened them and gave them peace.

ALLAH'S LOVE COMPARED TO GOD'S LOVE

Earlier I said that Islam's god does love, but it is love given only toward those who are obedient and righteous. Islam's god demands power over others: Islam means "submission", i.e. submitting to its god and Muhammad's rule. But the tender love of God, apart from this obedience, is not known in Islam.

Below are a number of verses I've found on Allah's love. I list a few more at the end of this article.

They ask thee concerning women's courses (menses). Say: They are a hurt and a pollution; so keep away from women in their courses and do not approach them until they are clean. But when they have purified themselves ye may approach them in any manner time or place ordained for you by Allah. For Allah loves those who turn to Him constantly and He loves those who keep themselves pure and clean.

3:31

Say: "If ye do love Allah follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins for Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful."

3:134

Those who spend (freely) whether in prosperity or in adversity; who restrain anger and pardon (all) men; for Allah loves those who do good.

3:146

How many of the Prophets fought (in Allah's way) and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in Allah's way nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And Allah loves those who are firm and steadfast.

28:77

"But seek with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee the Home of the Hereafter nor forget thy portion in this world: but do thou good as Allah has been good to thee and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief."

61:4

Truly Allah loves those who fight in His Cause in battle array as if they were a solid cemented structure.

You see in all of these verses that Allah's love is predicated upon the Muslim's performance. Muhammad's depiction of and theology on Allah's love contradict the depiction of God's love in the Bible. Compare and contrast the following Biblical verses to the Quranic verses above.

(**NOTE:** Please take the time to read the passages. In doing so, you will taste a strong difference in the flavors of love between Islam's Allah, and Christianity's God. By comparing the Scriptures of each faith, you will discern the differences in their Gods' natures. You will be able to see clearly and unequivocally, beyond any doubt, that Islam's god is not Christianity's God. Islam's god is not capable of true love.)

Hosea 2:13-16

I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the LORD. Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor (trouble) a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. "In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'"

Hosea 3:1

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."

Isaiah 54:5-8

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD Almighty is his name, the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.

Jeremiah 31:3

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jeremiah 31:9

They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to [a] them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

John 3:16-21

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son...."

Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:9-12

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Revelations 21:6, 7

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

I expect that you, the reader, have seen the difference between the quality of love between God and Allah. You can't miss it. Muhammad's god was incapable of great love. Its love was shallow. No wonder Muhammad believed that he would be tried in the grave and that he feared Allah's wrath; the spiritual power that he interacted with was incapable of giving him the true love of God. The true love of God gives peace to the believer. No wonder the early Muslims quickly turned to murdering each other; the spiritual power that rules Islam could not motivate them towards a life of love. The true love of God motivates people to lend a helping hand to each other, not destroy each other. No wonder so many people left Islam after Muhammad died; they tasted Islam and spat it out. No wonder those that left Islam said about the other Muslims, ***"Their religion does not stop them from shedding blood, terrifying the roads, and seizing properties."*** [10] (Yes, many early Muslims were terrorists just like the Muslim terrorists of today). **Because Islam lacks the true love of God, its followers can bomb children and believe they are doing Allah's will.**

CONCLUSION

Islam does not have a father, it has a master. Let me be blunt, what I've shown you is that Islam's god is not the same God Christians worship. He is a lesser spirit and inferior to God. Islam's god is no One God at all. He is not the Father, rather, he is a spiritual power that exerts control over people. The fact that Islam's god is unable to love as a true Creator reveals that he is not the Creator. Rather he is a master over his slaves, loving only those that do his bidding. It is a spiritual power that terrorized Muhammad, and only offered him a shallow love based upon performance. In many cases this performance motivated Muhammad to murder others.

ADDITIONAL QURANIC VERSES ABOUT ALLAH'S LOVE

3:76, 3:159, 49:9

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THE CRY OF THE HEART FOR GOD:

A Comparison of Mysticism and Intellect in Saint Augustine and Al-Ghazali

History is remarkable only when it is understood in terms of the great personalities that shaped its ebb and flow. Strip history of the dynamic struggle of the human spirit and it becomes merely a narrative of uninteresting epochs and events, lifeless and mundane, intriguing as a bill of sale or an accountant's ledger. Weave into history the triumphs and tragedies of the men and women of the ages, and history is transformed into a drama more exciting than fiction. Nations are established by the ambitions of one man, kingdoms crumble around the obsession of another. Power and passion, avarice and envy, seek expression through the medium of willing hosts. The multitudes polarize around the leadership of remarkable men while historians stand by the way to record the fray.

In the midst of the swirling mass of humanity, each soul struggling for recognition and the grasp for immortality, arise a few men who are able to distance themselves from the mires of self-seeking depravity. These personalities are not necessarily noteworthy for their unique physical prowess, nor their exceptional intellect, history is replete with such men, instead they often stand as beacons of light, exceptional in their personal quest, illuminating an ancient path that leads beyond the pit of sin and shame. Each major religion has had its prophets, sages, and holy men. By their example, humankind is reminded of his/her created state to reach beyond the material world and grasp a knowledge of God. And yet even within the ranks of these mystics, there are a few who have drawn our admiration and emulation because of the measure of the degree to which they have been successful in seemingly to grasp a knowledge of God. Two such men are Al-Ghazali and Saint Augustine. Born to different times but for similar destinies, both men were called upon to champion their respective faiths. Both men passionately pursued truth and an understanding of God. The impact they made on the development of Christianity and Islam respectively entreat an exploration into their influence. Al-Ghazali and Saint Augustine are not necessarily representative of the best of their respective religions, but their combination of solid scholastic inquiry for truth coupled with a driving passion to know God attracts similar hungry pilgrims like a moth to a flame.

By default, the lion's share of consideration falls to Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali. Saint Augustine is by far more familiar to the Western mind. Therefore, in order to avoid the pitfall of stating the obvious, this writer takes license in assuming sufficient knowledge of Saint Augustine exists on the part of the reader already for a comparison. The purpose of this paper is to focus on a brief sample of two of the writings of al-Ghazali. *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* or Revival of the Religious Sciences and *al-Munquidh min ad-Dalal* or Deliverance from Error are the most familiar writings of al-Ghazali to the West. *Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* was written after al-Ghazali's immersion into the Sufi way and is a comprehensive treatise on Islam. It is by far his most well known, and some would say greatest, contribution to Islam. *al-Munquidh min ad-Dalal* is, according to the scholar, a description of his "venture in climbing from the plain of naïve and second-hand belief to the peak of direct vision" (Watt 1982:19). The work is both autobiographical and explanatory of al-Ghazali's belief system. It is therefore invaluable as a rich, compact summation of what he believes. However, in order to contrast the two scholars it is beneficial to first open a brief window into the world that forged their steel resolves to apprehend God.

It can be argued that the atmosphere of crisis and confusion is the perfect climate for the emergence of a leadership that can spell the destruction of a particular religious movement or the catalyst for stability and expansion. Such were the times of Saint Augustine. Religious historians argue that the third and fourth centuries were critical in the survival of the then relatively young Christian religion. The church had expanded beyond the confines of its cradle of birth in Israel and was now found throughout the then Roman world. The followers of Jesus of Nazareth were growing in numbers and in doctrine. Letters of the apostles were circulated between the churches in order to teach the basic tenants of the faith, as well as to refute heresy. Despite these efforts, influential schools of belief contrary to the accepted teachings of the apostles were having a damaging effect on the church. It has been argued that the tide of heresy had to be stopped if the church was to survive. Into the historically insignificant town of Thagaste, North Africa was born Augustine; a very significant (though at that time unknown) standard against the heresy tide. Augustine's parents were of sufficient means to give him a formal education. Among the influence of the learned men of Thagaste, twain seeds were sown for young Augustine - a thirst to know truth and the hunger to know the passions of life. The death of his pagan father left young Augustine dependant on the persistence and prayers of his Christian mother to guarantee his future in academics. And persist she did, God answered prayer, and Augustine went onto excel in the various disciplines of the scholar, especially rhetoric. Augustine's ability to teach rising young public servant aspirants the art of speechmaking afforded him the luxury to continue in his riotous living (Wirt 1971:37). And yet despite success, the young scholar was still unsatisfied. The spark of Plato ignited a small flame of curiosity, and with his basic needs met by his acclaim as a teacher of rhetoric, Augustine turned his attentions to the mastery of theology. Pride and arrogance caused him to disdain the orthodox Christian church with its mysterious Scriptures, and instead embrace the heresy of Manicheism. Characteristic of Saint Augustine, he immersed himself in the study of this religion. Manicheism fulfilled Augustine's longing for God and yet allowed him to continue in the sensual lifestyle he had grown accustomed to or in his words "my soul was in weak and puny shape, its ulcers dripping, as it itched for some sensual contact on which it could scrape itself" (Wirt 1971:34). And yet the pseudo religion proved to be as unfulfilling as the riotous lifestyle Augustine had come to loathe, yet need. Eventually,

Augustine realized that Manicheism did not answer the deep seated questions in his heart. The persistence of his own problem with evil haunted him. Frustrated with his habits of passion and longing for meaning beyond the sciences, he turned back to the faith of his mother and scrutinized the Christian religion. Confronted with the realization that the Scriptures and their author (God) were true, Augustine finally abandoned his sensual lifestyle. Broken in spirit under a fig tree, Augustine yielded whole heartedly to God. It has been argued as to whether or not the crisis of faith in the garden at Milan was a salvation experience for Augustine or merely the culmination of his yielding his will finally to God. Sherwood Wirt in his translation of Augustine's Confessions chooses to word the translation in a way that favors a salvation experience in the garden when Augustine was thirty three years of age, instead of an earlier conversion when he was in his late twenties (1971:xiii). Regardless, Augustine pursued his new found love of God with the same zeal he had pursued in finding happiness through mere mortal embrace. The flame of God's love ignited his heart and even today the church can feel the heat from that flame.

Augustine went on to be ordained as the bishop of Hippo. His previous training in civil law and the art of rhetoric were instrumental in stemming the tide of Pelagianism. Augustine asserted that because Adam's fall infected all mankind with sin, salvation was totally by faith, not by merit. Salvation is a gift from God (Baker 1959:70). In addition to addressing Pelagianism, Augustine established the official doctrine of the church in regard to the Donatist controversy. Augustine said since the authority of the church guarantees the validity of any act the bishop might perform, a bishop who is a heretic can still give the sacraments. This argument greatly enhanced the recognition of the Roman Catholic Church's authority (Baker 1959:80).

Volumes have been written on Augustine's contribution to Christianity. He was strategically placed by God to contribute order and elegance to formal theology. D.W. Robertson, commenting on Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*, says Augustine's ability to write with eloquent exegetical principles marked a break from the writings of antiquity and shaped theology for the Middle Ages (1958:xi). It suffices here to reiterate that Augustine was critical in the growth of the church. His acclaim as one of the great church fathers is due not only to his skill as a scholar and the deft hand by which he pens the study of God, but also, Augustine is recognized as one of the great mystics of the Christian faith. Love and, especially, happiness found through a deep personal walk with God are the underlying themes of all his writings. On reading Augustine, one is left with the sense that God really does love mankind and desires to reveal Himself to the human race in a satisfying relationship. Scholastic integrity coupled with warm personal experience is the contribution Saint Augustine has endeared to Christianity. As one writer has put it, "No other philosopher ever brought the Creator and each and every creature into a closer affinity" (Schopp 1948:11).

Similar to the fourth century in Christianity, the eleventh century was also a critical time in the development of Islam. Outside influences from Hellenization, Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Buddhist philosophies had crept in on the heels of the Mu'tazilah (Rahman 1979:87). The Mu'tazilah assertion of free will and ambiguity as to the identity of the true Muslim threatened to uproot Islam at the root of its belief - the *Shari'a* or law. Islam was in need of scholars within its rank who could dissect the Greek philosophies, extract the truth they contained, and apply these truths in an articulate way. The gauntlet was taken up by Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali. This is not to say that up to this time no one was opposing the Mu'tazilah, many competent scholars of the Ash'arite school were attempting to react to the damaging influences of the Greeks, but the mastery of the complex logic needed to counteract its seduction was proving problematic. The Ash'arites have been called anti-rational to delineate that they were a reaction to the rational thought of the Greek philosopher (Tomeh ? :173). But the label of anti-rational also bespeaks of the reluctance of the Ash'arite scholars to grapple with Greek philosophy; in essence they refused to entertain the idea that it may in fact bear truth. The courage to immerse oneself into an unfamiliar discipline in order to understand its truth is the hallmark characteristic of al-Ghazali. For this Ash'arite scholar, all the sciences contained truth, truth which would lead the true "seeker" closer to all truth, namely God (Watt 1982:20-21). A passion to know God was applied to the path of inquiry. Al-Ghazali's renowned bridge between orthodoxy and mysticism was merely the logical end to the "seekers'" path. The following quote reiterates this tendency:

Even more significant was the fact that he was able to discover the way of life for a truly religious man to follow, so as to be prepared to attain that stage, when the supreme truth meant the spiritual accent of a faithful

enquirer, who diligently sought the truth for its own sake. It is hardly necessary to recall that for him the highest attainment of knowledge was the spiritual or divine truth. All other truths were of secondary importance (Shafaq 1954:45).

And again in Al-Ghazali's own words:

I have ever launched recklessly out into the midst of these ocean depths, I have ever bravely embarked on this open sea, throwing aside all craven caution; I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem, I have plunged into every abyss, I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay bare the inmost doctrines of every community. All this have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound tradition and heretical innovation. ... To thirst after a comprehension of things as they really are was my habit and custom from a very early age. (Watt 1982:20-21).

Al-Ghazali used the various disciplines of the academia as stepping stones to apprehending fulfillment in the knowledge of God. And yet, what set this Muslim apart? What shaped his education to cause him to pursue after truth about God?

The answer to the enigma of Al-Ghazali lies in the progression of his life. The similarities he shares with Augustine in his development as a scholar, stand as markers to contrast, Augustine and al-Ghazali's radical conclusions about what it means to know God.

Al-Ghazali was born in Tus in Khurasan near modern Meshed. He was orphaned at a very young age ((Lewis 1965:1038). According to his father's will he was placed under the care of a family friend and given the traditional education in the religious sciences (Stern 1990:7). Evidently, al-Ghazali demonstrated promise in the religious sciences, for at an early age he found himself the pupil of the renowned Nizam al-Mulk. Eventually Nizam al-Mulk sent al-Ghazali to Baghdad to be a professor at the *madrassa* he had founded there - the Nizamiyya. The young professor's personality and passion for truth was such that within four years he was one of the most prominent men in Baghdad and for those four years lectured to an audience of over three hundred students (Lewis 1965:1039). Al-Ghazali had fame, the favor of the Caliph, and the financial security his fellowship afforded him, and yet he was still not satisfied. Historians cite this period of turmoil in al-Ghazali's life as a nervous breakdown which caused him to resign his position as professor and precipitated his eleven year quest in search of the Sufi way (Lewis 1965:1039). However, in al-Ghazali's words, it was not a nervous illness but rather a crisis of truth. "I investigated the various kinds of knowledge I had, and found myself destitute of all knowledge with this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense perception and necessary truths" (Watt 1982:22). "I proceeded therefore with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense-perception and on necessary truths, to see whether I could no longer trust sense perception either ... the sense as judge forms his judgement, but another judge, the intellect, shows him to be wrong in such a way that the charge of falsity cannot be rebutted. To this I said: My reliance on sense-perception also has been destroyed" (1982:23). Eventually, al-Ghazali hypothesized that perhaps there was knowledge beyond even intellect. Perhaps the Sufis understood this knowledge to be their special ecstatic state they referred to. So al-Ghazali, as demonstrated before, set out to immerse himself in the way of the Sufi in order to "treat the unhealthy condition"(1982:25).

M.S. Stern, commenting on his translation of The Revival of the Religious Sciences, offers additional insight into perhaps why this "crisis of faith" occurred. Stern asserts that the seeds of the Sufi were already planted from al-Ghazali's childhood. Al-Ghazali's guardian, according to Stern, was himself a Sufi (1990:8). Additionally, Stern claims that al-Ghazali was disillusioned with his colleagues in Baghdad. In essence the crisis in his life was more a crisis of religious leadership than a mere illness (1990:8). Stern goes on to say that perhaps al-Ghazali was concerned that he would follow the path of his colleagues and use his influence as a religious teacher to further worldly ambitions. Joseph Politella concurs with Stern in this quote:

The strongest ties which fetter the soul are those of the creatures and the love of position, for the joy of exercising authority and control and of being superior to others and of being their leader is the joy which in this world most prevails over the souls of the intelligent ... " (Politella quoting al-Ghazali 1964:182)

The search for truth in the Sufi way was also a search for personal salvation (1990:8). Stern's arguments are more in keeping with al-Ghazali's own confession. The claim that perhaps the crisis was more political than spiritual, while possibly an underlying influence, does not bear up to the opinion of Watt and Stern.

Consequently, for eleven years al-Ghazali lived the life of a recluse. He left Baghdad with the intention of becoming a Hajji. His travels led him first to Damascus, then to Jerusalem and Hebron. In 1096 he did take part in the pilgrimage to Mecca. From Mecca he "lived as a poor Sufi, often in solitude, spending his time in meditation and other spiritual exercises" (Lewis 1965:1039). The quest brought him full circle back to Baghdad, back into teaching, and eventually, back to the writer's pen to record his pilgrimage and the truth he had found in *al-Munqidh min ad-Dalal*.

It goes without saying that al-Ghazali leaves an undeniable impression on the reader who comes across his script. The cry of the heart to know God is intertwined throughout the *Munqidh*. Al-Ghazali built the stool of honest academic inquiry and then stood on his toes of mystic longing and reached for God. Transparent in his pursuit of God and his willingness to share the gleanings of his quest with fellow seekers truly sets him apart among the early theologians of Islam. It is not hard to understand why most scholars are left with impressions about al-Ghazali such as: "a truly searching religious spirit" (Rahman 1979:94). Or, "Yet perhaps the greatest thing about al-Ghazali was his personality" (Watt 1982:15). The journey of the heart toward God, would by design lead many honest seekers into the pages of this Muslim mystic. For the theologian, regardless of the religion, one can find a companion in al-Ghazali; the desire to applaud his courage to ask why against the tide of the *Ummayyad* consensus. Al-Ghazali's willingness to tackle the giant of Greek philosophy, subdue it, and then subject it to Islam (see Piety and Proofs by John Clayton) warrants praise. The skill with which al-Ghazali prescribed obedience to the Shariah as a meaningful way of life undoubtedly was a welcome melody to the ears of the religious leaders of the Umma (Lewis 1965:1041). The overall speculation of what Islam would be like today without the contribution of this one man leaves one to consider the words of McCarthy: "With the time came the man. I seemed to hear trumpets: philosophical and theological and mystical trumpets, trumpets of strife and battle, trumpets of death and life" (commenting on a quote by McDonald about al-Ghazali (1980:ix).

To my knowledge, there yet remains to be seen, in English, a thorough comparison between St. Augustine and al-Ghazali, though very much needed in light of the recent interest in a Christian and Muslim context of dialogue. However, there are two works by Johan Bouman in German on the two mystics. The tendency for many experts on al-Ghazali is to compare briefly (usually no more than a paragraph) al-Ghazali with Saint Augustine. Often the comparison is on equal terms (Burrell 1987:176; Upper 1952:23; Tomeh 1952:184; McCarthy 1980:xxxiv). While they are similar in background and even on some points of philosophy, there is a distinct difference in their frame of reference as to the knowability of God. Time and again the issue of knowing God is used to link these two great philosophers. But, like so many other terms Christianity and Islam share, the same word often has totally different if not opposite meanings (i.e. sin, salvation, and faith). The phrase "know God" is also very different in its frame of reference. Christianity, in its basic doctrine, proclaims that to know God means more than knowledge of God, it means relational. As will be demonstrated, the mystical experience of God in Islam, though ecstatic and steeped in mystery, would never claim relationship with God. A brief summation of the basic beliefs of al-Ghazali demonstrates this stark contrast between the two religions.

Al-Ghazali was a prolific writer. Conservative estimates place his publications at, minimally, a hundred and twenty works, dealing with almost all of the Islamic problems of his period (Shafaq 1954:43). While the volume of his work prohibits an exhaustive description of his beliefs, it is possible to glean from his two most renowned works, The Revival of the Religious Sciences and Deliverance from Error, some basic underlying assumptions about the nature of God and man. For the purpose of this paper it is important to consider basically five foundational truths al-Ghazali would hold to: the nature of the soul, sin and repentance, knowledge of God, the elements of belief, and the relationship between the sensory and the intellect.

Muslims believe that each individual is created by God good and without sin. Al-Ghazali affirms this presupposition when he compares the heart or the soul to a mirror. Al-Ghazali is very clear what he means by the heart: "man is formed of a body and a heart - and by the heart I mean the essence of man's spirit which is the seat of knowledge of God" (McCarthy 1980:101). The heart (soul) is compared to a mirror that is given to each person when they are born in a state of high polish. According al-Ghazali, the person that presents their soul to God in the same state they received it will gain entrance into paradise. "If man sins he allows vapor and filth to encrust itself upon the surface of the mirror ... Once a mirror begins to dull it must immediately be cleansed and

polished" (Stern 1990:18). But how does one go about polishing the heart in order to keep it presentable before God?

First, in order to understand how to clean the soul before God, it is necessary to understand what al-Ghazali believes as to how we relate to God. Again basic to the doctrine of Islam is the transcendence of God and the inability for His creation to know Him. Instead, what can be known about God is merely his attributes as are revealed in the Qur'an. It has been argued that, aside from the Sufis, the philosophers and theologians have not felt the need to question the possibility of a human relationship with God, lest they threaten God's sovereignty and transcendence (Geisler 1993:28). And yet, al-Ghazali is known primarily as a mystic who wedded orthodox Islam with Sufism. Is this one area where al-Ghazali breaks with traditional Islam and sides with the Sufi assertion of absorption into God? What does al-Ghazali mean by "knowing" God? S.R. Shafaq argues that al-Ghazali "rejects the idea of crude pantheism" which the more extreme forms of Sufism claimed, such as identification or unification (*ittihad*), incarnation (*hulul*), inherence or joining (*wusul*) with God (1954:46). This claim receives credibility in Deliverance from Error when al-Ghazali says: "In general what they manage to achieve is nearness to God; some however, would conceive of this as inherence, some as union, and some as connection. All that is erroneous" (Watt 1982:61). And yet, al-Ghazali seemingly embraced the experiential state of the Sufis. Al-Ghazali has often been accused of paradoxical statements, but on this point it is not a paradoxical dilemma but rather a different meaning of the term to "know". For al-Ghazali, knowing God is knowing His revelation. It is not personal, relational knowledge. Love for God is to love the revelation He has given in the Qur'an. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh summarizes this well in a quote from Al-Arba'in:

Know that the purpose of the commandments is to strengthen the feeling of joy in the recollection of the Almighty and Adored God, that man may return to the world of eternity and that the heart may be indifferent to the world of temptation; but only he will have bliss in the next world who comes to his God (at his death) through love, and only he can love God who knows Him and frequently mentions His name, since knowledge and love can only be attained by constant meditation and recollection. Nor can the recollection of God be kept lastingly in the heart except by (deeds) that recall Him and these are the commandments. (1961:176).

David B. Burrell echoes Yafeh when he confirms al-Ghazali's affirmation in an unknowable God when he says: "So if God be unknowable, the way to God is unchartable, except as a set of invitations to set out on a journey of self-becoming, which defines our central task in life" (1987:178-179). In other words God is not knowable in the familiar sense, but more in a sense of "gnosis". The excursions into the realm of experiencing God is more of ecstasy induced by reflections on what is known about Him. According to al-Ghazali, obedience to the commands of God affords the "seeker" to maintain a "polished mirror" and thereby facilitating him in his/her pursuit of "loving" God. Loving God compels the Muslim to obedience. Al-Ghazali defines this reciprocal relationships in terms of *science of revelation* and *science of action*.

Belief, according to al-Ghazali is a ongoing relationship between the science of revelation and the science of actions. The science of revelations comprises a belief in God, His attributes and His deeds. The absence of an affirmation in God's revelation is unbelief. Unbelief is the guarantee of eternal damnation in hell. Adherence to the science is belief in monotheism and Divine revelation, primarily the revelation of the Qur'an through the Prophet (Stern 1990:17). Al-Ghazali would put the mystery of Sufism under the category of revelation. The confidence al-Ghazali has in the value of the mystical is evident in the following:

Beyond intellect there is yet another stage. In this another eye is opened, by which he beholds the unseen, what is to be in the future, and other things which are beyond the keen of intellect. ... God most high has favored His creatures by giving them something analogous to the special faculty of prophecy, namely dreams. ... dreams (because they fall beyond what can be perceived) are analogous to prophecy.... The other properties of prophetic revelation are apprehended only by immediate experience from the practice of the mystic way." (Watt 1982:64-66)

The flight of ecstasy, according to Al-Ghazali, remains tethered to the ground of the intellect through the binding of what is revealed (Revelation).

The second arm of belief is that of actions. Actions compromise the practical duties and states of man's heart. Al-Ghazali equates actions with faith and faith with knowledge (1990:17). Ignorance is the cause of all sin.

Therefore it is understandable how a Muslim can still be a Muslim and yet sin. Sin for the Muslim is not moral failure but merely a mistake made by ignorance of the right way to behave - the sunna of the Muslim.

According to al-Ghazali the relationship between the two sciences is one of reciprocity. "Only the combination of knowledge (*revelation and belief*) and action (*intellect*) can ensure the proper performance ..." (Lawrance-Yafeh 1961:178). Therefore, the role of repentance is not sorrow for a transgression of a moral law per se, but more of a returning to the proper actions as found in the revelation of the Qur'an. Repentance affords the obedient Muslim to polish the mirror of his soul in order to reflect upon the attributes of God, in order to experience "knowing" God. Repentance is ceasing from sin, and embracing again the commandments of God as expressed through Islam. This notion of repentance as being a "returning to" as opposed to the Christian notion of repentance as a "turning from" is illustrated in a story al-Ghazali told on this topic. The story goes:

Accompanied by his camel which bore his food and drink, a traveler came to an arid desert. He laid down his head and napped. He awoke and his camel was gone. He searched for it until the heat and thirst overcame him, et cetera. He said, I will return whence I started and sleep until I die. He proceeded to place his head upon his arm so as to die. Then he was aroused, and lo, his camel stood before him, provisions intact. God's joy at the repentance of the faithful servant is more intense than that of the man on account of his camel. (Ghazali quoting Muhammad) (Stern 1990:34).

The story of the camel communicates more than repentance. It summarizes Al-Ghazali's basic view of what it means to know God and how to relate to Him. The camel is independent by nature, and subject to his passions. The camel is dependant upon his master, because the master alone knows how to draw water from the well. Try as the camel might, he can never draw water for himself. The master, in exchange for the loyalty of the camel, provides the basics of life and generally gives the camel a better life than he would have out in the desert. Just as the camel can never enjoy a relationship beyond that of master and servant, the Muslim is limited to a knowledge of God in obedience. To know God is to obey Him. To love God is to love obeying Him. Ecstasy for the Sufi is not communion with God, but the degree to which the soul can identify with the revelation of God. This identifying with God's revelation as a way "to know" God is illustrated in the inseparable link between the Qur'an, the names of God, and the use of dervishes and chants as the avenue of ecstasy in the Sufi way of worship. For Al-Ghazali, identifying with God was yielding to God's revelation, subjecting his passions, and apprehending truth. In answer to the mystics in Islam who claim to relate with God, he says: "Salvation is to be found in the experience of God the Beloved. It is a constant state attainable only in the hereafter" (Stern 1990:19). To al-Ghazali, "knowing" God is the act of understanding His attributes and revelation while looking toward the door of death where then he would know (relational) or be absorbed into God.

Augustine of Hippo and Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali remain as truly great scholars and theologians today. Perhaps the appeal of al-Ghazali to the Western mind is due in part to his methods of describing what he believes. Al-Ghazali's extensive background in philosophy and logic appeals to our own frame of reference and mirrors that of Saint Augustine. Both men demonstrated a passion for pursuing truth, and the holder of truth, God, with a fervor that thrust them into the admiration of their peers and their critics. Both men poured their lives into satisfying their longing to know God. And though often they walked the same path, it was in the crisis of faith that the path divided into to very different ends. Perhaps a comparison of Saint Augustine and al-Ghazali is more like the comparison between the story of the camel and another story - the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The difference in the stories is the difference between a master's praise over a wayward camel, and the joyous grasp of a father's warm embrace as he welcomes home a wayward son. One is the recipient of a sense of restoration, the other the object of loving forgiveness. The comprehension of the degree to which each man attained his goal of knowing God is reflected in their words. When al-Ghazali was asked to explain what he found in his quest for God, he replied: "What I experience, I shall not try to describe, call me happy, but ask me no more" (Shafaq 1954:47). The reader can almost hear him working the cud. In contrast, the words of Saint Augustine reflect a different "knowledge" of God. Hear the words of a man who found the knowledge of God was wrapped up in knowing God:

Let me know you my Knower. Let me know you even as you know me. Power of my soul, enter into it and make it fit for yourself, without spot or wrinkle, then claim it and possess it. That's what I hope for, and why I speak

out. That hope is what really gives me the joy of my salvation I talked to you freely as a child talks to its father, Lord my God, my light, my treasure, my salvation. (Wirt 1971:122).

The contrast goes beyond mere literary styles and cultural cues. The contrast highlights one of the core points of disagreement between Muslims and Christians - namely the approachability of God. It was not the purpose of this paper to belittle the accomplishments of al-Ghazali, nor to set him up as a "straw man" to elevate the Christian faith. Al-Ghazali stands as one of the greatest scholars of Islam. His lifelong search to understand truth in order to know God is a candid picture that captures the heart of many a Muslim as they seek to know their unknowable God. In contrast, the warm, intimate reflection of Saint Augustine invites the need for a more lengthy treatise comparing these two men. Mysticism as a whole may be similar across cultures, but the similarity ends at the point of "experiencing" God. Islam has not cast off its pre-Islamic stone effigies it detests, but merely transferred unknowable stone to unknowable script. The Love from God is reserved (for the Muslim) for those who love His revelation, the Qur'an. In the contrast between communion with God (Christian) and the knowledge about God (Muslim) there is no comparison. Love for a revelation is no substitute for the warm embrace of the revealer of all truth - Jesus Christ.

R. M. Lotz

May 20, 1997

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On January 7, 1855, the minister of New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, England, opened his morning sermon as follows:

It has been said by someone that "the proper study of mankind is man." I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father.

There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subjects we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, "Behold I am wise." But when we come to this master science, finding that our plumline cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, "I am but of yesterday, and know nothing." No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God....

But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe.... The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as a devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in his immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead. It is to that subject that I invite you this morning.

These words, spoken over a century ago by C. H. Spurgeon (at that time, incredibly, only twenty years old) were true then, and they are true now. They make a fitting preface to a series of studies on the nature and character of God.

Abraham, Father of Faith

From Bob Kirk (kirk@lambton.on.ca)

Newsgroups: soc.religion.islam

Subject: Abraham

Date: Wed Oct 09 14:03:35 EDT 1996
Message-Id: 53gpdn\$52@shellx.best.com

As members of the three great Monotheistic faiths, believers in the one, true God, let us examine our common father Abraham, and his faith in the Almighty, the Creator of all.

The Qur'an, in sura 37:102-108 states, 'He [Abraham] said: "I will take refuge with my Lord; He will give me guidance. Lord, grant me a righteous son." We gave him news of a gentle son. And when he reached the age when he could work with him, his father said to him: "My son, I dreamt that I was sacrificing you. Tell me what you think." He replied: "Father do as you are bidden. God willing, you shall find me steadfast." And when they had both submitted to God's will, and Abraham had laid down his son prostrate upon his face, We called out to him, saying: "Abraham, you have fulfilled your vision." Thus do We reward the righteous. That was indeed a bitter test. We ransomed his son with a noble sacrifice and bestowed on him the praise of later generations. "Peace be on Abraham!" Thus do We reward the righteous.' (The Koran, translation by N.J. Dawood) And in 2:139-140 we read: 'Say [To People of the Book]: "Would you dispute with us about God, who is our Lord and your Lord? We shall both be judged by our works. To Him alone we are devoted. "Do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, were all Jews or Christians?" Say: "Who knows better, you or God?"'

These verses identify the Qur'an's position on Abraham and his relationship with God. They can be further summarized into three essential points:

1. The author states that he will reward the righteous for their devotion, obedience and good works, based on Abraham's example. 'Thus shall we reward the righteous.' In other words, righteous works merit reward.
2. The author states that Abraham did not profess the faith known as Judaism, nor Christianity, and believers (Muslims) are to ask the People of the Book to examine whether or not Abraham, Isaac etc., were Jews or Christians.
3. Both 'Believers' (Muslims) and 'People of the Book' (Jews and Christians are people of the same God, and of the spiritual lineage of Abraham.

It is necessary here once again, to examine the Qur'an's opinion of the scriptures contained in 'The Book' which Christians and Jews possessed in about 650AD when the Qur'an referenced them. Sura 6:89-91 reads, (speaking about Job, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, David, Solomon, John, Jesus etc.), 'Such is God's guidance; He bestows it on whom He pleases of His servants. Had they served other gods besides Him, their labours would have been vain indeed. On those men We bestowed the Scriptures, wisdom, and prophethood. If these are denied by this generation, We will entrust them to others who will not deny them.'

It is clear that what constituted scripture in the time of the Qur'an (and indeed does today), was accepted as previous revelation from God. What then does previous scripture say about Abraham?

First, consider this story:

Suppose you received a speeding ticket one day on the local highway. In court, you stand before the judge, and look for something to say. What would or could you say? Would you waste your time telling him that you've driven that particular stretch of highway _within_ the speed limit more often than you have _exceeding_ it? Would he let you off under the theory that your 'good deeds outweigh the bad'? You know that this is the case for virtually all of the people who use that stretch of road. They usually drive within the limit except when they are late, or at least justify to themselves reason for exceeding the limit. So would this work with the judge? How much less would it work with God?

Would you then tell him that if he lets you off this time you will never break the law again? You know that this doesn't hold water. He gives you a look of, 'Are you serious'? For if you actually do manage to go without breaking the law again, you're only doing what the law requires. You aren't getting extra merit or credit for doing what you are supposed to be doing anyway, and therefore, you certainly aren't removing from yourself the 'guiltiness' of speeding in the past.

Let us then look to the Torah to find what is recorded of our forefather. Representatively, one can look at Abra(ha)m's story in Genesis as a cyclical one, which centers in organization around the expulsion and saving of Hagar and her son Ismael. Though the actual analysis of why this is so is beyond the scope of this article, one

can reference Galatians 4:21-31 for the beginnings of insight into that matter.

The following is an illustration of Abra(ha)m's life as recorded in Genesis. Information in square brackets is information which does not follow the precise observed pattern.

A Geneological framework (11:10-32)
B Migration from Haran; separation from Nahor ([12:1-3]12:4-5a)
C Building of altars; land promised (12:5b-9[13.14-18])
D Wife/Sister episode (12:10-20)
E Border agreement with Lot (13:1-13)
F Sodom episode and rescue of Lot (14.1-24)
G Covenant of sacrifice (15:1-21)
X Expulsion and rescue of Hagar (16.1-16)
G'Covenant of circumcision (17.1-27)
F'Sodom episode and rescue of Lot (18:1-19:38)
[E'Border agreement with Abimelech (21.22-34)]
D'Wife/Sister episode (20:1-18)
C'Building of altar (22:6); land secured (22:17b;23:1-20)
B'Migration to Haran; reunification with Nahor's line (24:1-67)
A'Geneological framework ([22:20-24]25:1-18)

To be more concise, in another way, let us examine which parts of Abraham's life more directly relate to the Qur'anic quotes earlier. In Genesis 12, we see Abram leave the land of his father, and venture on the word and command of the Lord, to '... a land that I will show you' (12:1 all verses NKJV unless otherwise noted). God here begins to relate to Abram the special position he will have in terms of God's plan for the world. In 12:2, we read, 'I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.' Then, in verse 7 we read, 'To your descendants I will give this land.' The Lord, when Abram was finally in Canaan, speaks to him in chapter 13, verse 15, 'for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.' After this (as indicated in the above illustration), Abram rescues Lot the first time, and God makes a covenant with Abram. Chapter 15 is the first of two major areas of interest in terms of the difference between the Muslim and Christian perceptions of Abram's relation to God.

Chapter 15:1-6 'After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your reward shall be very great." (1) But Abram said, "Lord God, what will you give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!" And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.'

Here, there are a number of issues that must be addressed. First, the Lord promises Abram reward, _before_ Abram has done any work or obedience such as spoken in Qur'an sura 37:108, which its author indicates is the reason for reward. God in his Wisdom and Grace has set Abram apart here, because he has believed in the only LORD. God 'accounted' Abram as righteous, not because he had yet gone to sacrifice his son Isaac, but because he had faith, evidenced by his following the voice of the LORD to leave his homeland to receive the promised land. There is a very distinct distinction here between the faith and works of Abraham (and man) as justification. I will comment on this again, at the close of this article.

After this, Abram receives many things, such as his name being changed from 'exalted father' in Abram, to 'father of a multitude' in Abraham, and the birth of Ishmael, and the promise of Isaac, through whom Abraham's descendants would receive an everlasting eternal covenant. The Lord establishes the covenant of circumcision, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, Hagar and Ishmael leave, and Isaac is born.

Genesis chapter 22 is the location of the second significant (in terms of this analysis) happening. Here is the section in particular of which I wish to speak, verses 1 through 13, and 15 through 18;

22:1 'Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

22:2 'And He said, "Take now you son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

22:3 'So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

22:4 'Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off.

22:5 'And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

22:6 'So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand and a knife, and the two of them went together.

22:7 'But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am my son." And he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?"

22:8 'And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." And the two of them went together.

22:9 'Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him upon the altar, upon the wood.

22:10 'And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

22:11 'But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am."

22:12 'And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; _for now I know that you fear God_ (my emphasis), since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me."

22:13 'Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son.

22:15 'Then the Angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time out of heaven,

22:16 'and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the Lord, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld, you only son,

22:17 'in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies.

22:18 'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.'(NKJV)

First, it should be noted that the same promises made here in verses 16-18, were made above in the aforementioned chapters 12, 13 and 15. Here however, the Lord states, 'By Myself I have sworn..' In other words, by the most absolute, Holy standard by which truth can be stated or gauged, Himself, God has guaranteed that these promises shall come to pass. Here, Abraham by his faith, was given the assurance that no longer could sin or disobedience (or anything) turn the fulfillment of the promises of the Lord from him and his descendants. Second, there is one key to understanding the entire situation of the above verses, that is verse 12, specifically the section emphasized above. '...for now I know that you fear God...' In other words, the purpose of the test. It was to determine through Abraham's actions, whether or not Abraham truly feared the Lord. This 'fear' is not simple trepidation of danger or the act of being scared of something, but fear in the sense of complete faith and submission. The test was not directly to get Abraham to go to the point of lifting the knife above Isaac for its own sake, but to testify to the beliefs Abraham held, and the degree to which the Lord was his 'living, active' Lord.

Third, and somewhat relatedly, since Abraham did not actually complete the work, the work itself for its own sake can not be the reason for the 'reward'. I will speak of the Qur'an's interpretation in a moment.

So, if Abraham's works did not accumulate 'rewards' for him, and those works attested to the true matter under test, namely Abraham's faith, then his faith was graced by the reception of the covenant of everlasting Lordship from the one and only God. This is the real 'reward' for Abraham's righteousness, and was not earned by the works per se, but by the faith Abram had in God, which was exemplified in his works, the fruits of his faith.

The disciples and apostles of Christ were aware of these important distinctions about Abraham, and accordingly, commented on them in the books of the New Testament:

James 2:21-24 'Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed GOD, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"'(RSV)
Romans 4:1-5 'What then shall we say about Abraham our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed GOD, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due. And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.'(RSV)

Now, these two authors, James and Paul, are often misquoted by Muslims, (and even some non-believers) to point to two apparently different salvation 'mechanisms' in the Christian faith. However, on closer inspection, one can see that both emphasize either faith or works, but only in order to underline the requirement for both. In other words, faith in God, produces works, and faith without works is dead. So are works in vain, without faith. James states that Abraham, in performing his good works, is completing his faith. He is not working to gain merit, or reward, but to testify to his faith. In other words, to glorify God. Paul, likewise, is stating that no one can do righteous works before the Lord which surpass His (God's) in order to be able to boast. On the contrary, it is faith in God, which _evidenced through_ the works and not _by_ the works, receives grace from God, and this is a gift, that no man should boast. Abraham, received a reckoning of righteousness not as a reward for his works, (which the sacrifice of his son was NOT completed anyhow), but for the faith which evidenced through the binding of his son testified to. There is a real, important difference here.

Let us then reexamine the Qur'anic account of 37:102-108 above. Abraham had a vision in which he was sacrificing his son. 'Allah' states that Abraham has 'fulfilled' his vision. Now, if the Abraham's vision including completing the sacrifice of Isaac, why did the author say it had been completed, when it hadn't? If the vision Abraham had included him not killing Isaac, being stopped at the last instant by the Lord, intervening to save his son, then how could this have been anything even remotely resembling a 'bitter test' deserving of a 'reward'? Knowing that the Lord would intervene and save Isaac, how could this have been a test worthy of anything? Knowing one will not lose anything save for a couple of days of their time, to inherit 'the praise of later generations' seems more than worth doing.

But further, the reward in the Qur'anic account is clearly attributed to Abraham's works of obedience. How is it that he was rewarded for something that was left undone? The actual 'vision' Abraham had of sacrificing his son, mentioned as fulfilled by the author, was left incomplete. Yet this is the basis of Islamic theology, as indicated in sura 2:140 above, 'We shall both be judged by our works.'

I refer again to the story mentioned at the beginning of this article. How does one by doing only what is required make up for that which we have failed in already? We can't.

It is also true that Jesus spoke of reward from God. For example, in Matthew 6:1-4 we read, 'Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly(2).'

This seems to suggest as the Qur'an states, reward for good works. However, Jesus continues on to speak in the same breaths, verses 5 and 6; 'And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. but you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly(2).'

How does prayer merit reward, and what reward is merited by prayer, something so unique and diverse to each individual? To find the answer to this question, we turn to the original Greek, contained in the UBS4 Greek/English Interlinear Translation, and find something intriguing. The words Jesus actually used, as the 'reward' God will give us in verses 4 and 6, is 'repay you'. This differs from the literal 'reward' that the hypocrites of verses 2 and 5 seek from men. In other words, they seek as verse 2 states, 'glory' from their fellow men. So what will God repay us, and for what, as everything we have is His to begin with? The only place we actually see the

word 'reward' used by Jesus here in terms of what God will give us, is in verse 1, which more accurately reads transliterated, 'But be careful the righteousness of you not to demonstrate before men with the aim to be seen by them; otherwise, you have no reward with the Father of you in the heavens.'(UBS4)
So righteousness is that for which reward or repayment is spoken of. Righteousness evidenced in prayer and charitable works. Jesus knew exactly what God had been saying to Abraham so many centuries before.

Therefore, I would like to return once again to the statement made in the opening quote of this article, from the Qur'an in the same sura 37:108, 'We called out to him, saying: "Abraham, you have fulfilled your vision." Thus do We reward the righteous.' Is this saying what Jesus said above? Though the English words 'righteous' and 'reward' appear together, are they saying the same thing?

Nahmanides, a great Jewish Rabbi and expositor on the Torah in the twelfth century, wrote in his 'Commentary on the Torah-Genesis' chapter Lech Lecha on Genesis XV:
'(Genesis, my comment)6. And he believed in the Eternal; and he accounted it to him for righteousness. The correct interpretation appears to me to be that the verse is stating that Abraham believed in G-d and he considered it due to the righteousness of the Holy One, blessed be He, that He would give him a child under all circumstances, and _not because of Abram's state of righteousness and his reward_ (my emphasis), even though He told him, 'Your reward shall be very great'(verse 1, my comment). Thus from now on he would no longer have to fear that sin might prevent the fulfillment of the promise. Now although in the case of the first prophecy Abraham had thought that the promise was conditional upon the recompense for his deeds, yet now since He promised him that he should have no fear on account of sin and that He will give him a child, he believed that the thing is established _by God_ (my emphasis).

Also, one of the greatest Rabbinical Jewish mind's in history, Maimonides in his 'The Guide for the Perplexed', chapter LIII - Explanation of Hesed (Love), Mishpat (Judgement), and _Zedakah (Righteousness)_ writes:
'The term zedakah is derived from zedek, "righteousness"; it denotes the act of giving every one his due, and of showing kindness to every being according as it deserves. In scripture however, the expression zedakah is not used in the first sense, and does not apply to the payment of what we owe to others. When we therefore give the hired labourer his wages, or pay a debt, we do not perform an act of zedakah. But we do perform the act of zedakah when we fulfill those duties towards our fellow-men which our moral conscience imposes upon us; e.g., when we heal the wound of the sufferer...When we walk in the way of virtue we act righteously towards our intellectual faculty, and pay what is due unto it; and because every virtue is thus zedakah, Scripture applies the term to the virtue of _faith in God_.(and not deserving retribution for works, my emphasis and comment) Comp. "And he believed in the Lord, and he accounted it to him as righteousness"(Gen. xv. 6)'
In other words, the Grace of God. On the righteous, those with faith who testify by their works, God will and has poured out his grace. This is the true reward for Zedakah, that Jesus knew would be poured from His hands, His feet and His side on all those who had faith like Abraham.

One can see from this material, that the possibility exists that the writer of the Qur'an, simply misunderstood, or rather, incompletely understood the implication and literal description of Abraham's righteousness, and from this, created the underlying doctrine of the Qur'an, that of salvation through obedience and works. There is no other way to interpret it in my opinion. Abraham, the father of our faiths did not 'earn' his reward, as then he would not have been reckoned as righteous, but rather reckoned as obedient. Abraham _was_ obedient, but it was because of his faith that the Lord set him apart and named him Abraham.

The reason for this exercise, was to show that dependence on works themselves for salvation are not how our father Abraham was accounted as righteous and rewarded before the Lord. In claiming 'true submission' or otherwise, one must examine the doctrine they espouse and test it's validity against what it claims. The Qur'an in my opinion can not be what it claims to be, (in part) as it calls men and women to 'save' themselves by right conduct and thought. Though these are requirements in Christianity as well, one is not directly saved by their charitable works or obedience in prayer. Jesus knew this, and so did Abraham.

Luke 7:44-50 'Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did

not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." And He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Then he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace."

Peace in Christ,
Bob Kirk

John 8:56-58, "'Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.'" Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

note 1, NKJV alternately reads, 'your exceedingly great reward'

note 2, United Bible Society (UBS) 4th edition Greek Text does not include 'openly'. Only KJV (NKJV) and NEB include this manuscript textual addition

Who is the Real Jesus?

By [Dallas M. Roark](#), Ph.D.

The most important question in all religious questions is: who is Jesus? Secularists believe he was a misguided man, Muslims believe he was a prophet, Hindus have respect for him as a wise man, orthodox Christians believe Him to be the Son of God. Who was He really? The only real answer to this question can be found in the Bible since there are few references to Him in pagan and Jewish literature. There is only one repeated answer in the Bible: He is the Son of God in a unique sense, God Incarnate. One can only reject this claim by rejecting God's intervention in history, rejecting miracles, rejecting the greatest miracle of the resurrection of Jesus, or rejecting God. If you reject all of these you can only conclude that he was a person who was self-deluded, who is not worthy to be followed, neither worthy to be an influence in our lives. Let us begin at the beginning of all beginnings.

First, we have to begin the story with the most basic question. Philosophers have asked the question: "why is there something and not nothing?" Why is there something at all? Physicists and Astronomers talk about the Big Bang of the Universe. The big bang relates to the beginning of space, time and matter. How did it come about? Absolute Nothing does not produce something! Anything that begins has a cause of its beginning. The world in which we live is designed with such intricacy that we are only now beginning to know something of its inner working.

If we accept the fact that there is an eternal Creator, we can ask the question of why he did this great work. He did not have to prove his power to anybody since no one existed at the time. The real motivation for this great work of Creation is Love. This love is expressed through the Bible culminating in the story of Jesus.

Love is creative. Love bestows value and worth on others. Love is expansive. Love delights in giving of itself. Love expresses itself in acts of kindness, deeds that bring joy to the beloved. So the answer to the question of why the universe exists is that the Creator loves.

Who is this Creator, this person of Love? His name is given in the book of Exodus to Moses, the man of God, as Yahweh. That is His personal name. The term God is not his name but refers to a Being who has the name of Yahweh. This Being is personal, creative, and expressed his love in Creation. This love is expressed in the very location and placement of the earth in the universe.

There are many harsh places where life cannot be sustained in the cosmos. Our planet is in what has been called the Galactic Habitable Zone of the Cosmos. We are away from areas where there are black holes, gamma rays, X-rays, particle radiation, and other massive threats to human life.

God's love is expressed in His providing for all the needs of human life from the basic grains we eat to succulent fruits. Before man appeared on the scene, the Creator had prepared the planet for our existence. The very act of creating the beginning of the human race is an act of His love. He bestowed on Adam and Eve the gift of life and on all subsequent humans. Even when the first couple sinned against the Creator and were removed from the Garden of Eden, His love and patience were still operating. He could have destroyed them. But even in the midst of this great disappointment in his creatures, he made a promise which has come to be regarded as the first promise of the future Messiah. After Adam and Eve had fallen into Satan's temptation to disobey God, the Lord says to Satan,

"You and this woman will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel." (Gen. 3:15)^[1]

The love of the Creator was displayed in his patience with human sinfulness. Noah preached for 120 years before judgment brought the flood. Noah himself was not a warrior, but a spokesman for righteousness.

Yahweh's love was directed in a different way when he chose Abram to be the father of a chosen people who would bless everyone on earth.

"The LORD (Yahweh) said to Abram: Leave your country, your family, and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you. I will bless you and make your descendants into a great nation. You will become famous and be a blessing to others. I will bless anyone who blesses you, but I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you." (Gen 12:1-3)

As God's chosen people there was work to be done and training to take place. The many books of the Old Testament relate to the disobedience of the descendants of Abraham and God's patience with them. Even His discipline or judgment of them was done for their good to draw them back to Himself in love. The training involved the laws given to Moses to help the people see that God was holy. God's holiness is against sin. God was against idolatry because idols cannot create, rescue, or heal. False gods cannot hear, see, or respond in help, they are silent. False gods consume the person by futile practices of prayers, sacrifices, pilgrimages, and costly offerings. Idolatry has involved disgusting practices of child sacrifice, temple prostitution, and other false and sinful ideas. God's love called for wholesomeness, goodness, and the choosing of life, not death.

Moses was given a loving experience by God. He asked about the name of God so that the people of Israel would know. God revealed his name as Yahweh. This is his sacred name, not a descriptive term about Him. Knowing the name of a person is one of the important steps in knowing the person.

God, in his love, followed up on the Messianic promises. Moses talked about a coming prophet but the later prophets give many descriptions of that person. What kind of being was the Messiah to be? The prophets give an answer to this question.

Isaiah spoke God's promised Messiah to Israel,

"A child has been born for us. We have been given a son who will be our ruler. His names will be **Wonderful Advisor and Mighty God, Eternal Father and Prince of Peace**. His power will never end; peace will last forever. He will rule David's kingdom and make it grow strong. He will always rule with honesty and justice. The LORD All-Powerful will make certain that all of this is done." (Isa. 9:6-7)

These are strong words concerning the Messiah who is the Mighty God, the Father of eternity, and the prince of peace. These words find their fulfillment in the Gospel story.

In the 11th chapter of Isaiah God declares,

“Like a branch that sprouts from a stump, someone from David's family will someday be king. The Spirit of the LORD will be with him to give him understanding, wisdom, and insight. He will be powerful, and he will know and honor the LORD.” (Isa. 11:1-2)

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him and we will see this when we look at the Gospels ahead of us.

The birthplace of the Messiah is listed in Micah 5:2

“Bethlehem Ephrath, you are one of the smallest towns in the nation of Judah. But the LORD will choose one of your people to rule the nation – someone whose family goes back to ancient times.”

The Messiah to be born was one whose life was from everlasting, eternal, and who entered into the life of Israel as Savior.

God declares through Jeremiah that a New Covenant will be made in which He will put His Spirit within people, he will forgive their sins, and they shall be His people. (Jer. 31:31-33)

Jesus made a new covenant at the last supper before his crucifixion.

The details of the messianic expectation can be seen in the many passages concerning the coming of the Messiah. Not only are there words to indicate the quality of person that would come, but his death is also described in Isaiah.

“Has anyone believed us or seen the mighty power of the LORD in action? Like a young plant or a root that sprouts in dry ground, the servant grew up obeying the LORD. He wasn't some handsome king. Nothing about the way he looked made him attractive to us. He was hated and rejected; his life was filled with sorrow and terrible suffering. No one wanted to look at him. We despised him and said, ‘He is a nobody!’ He suffered and endured great pain for us, but we thought his suffering was punishment from God. He was wounded and crushed because of our sins; by taking our punishment, he made us completely well. All of us were like sheep that had wandered off. We had each gone our own way, but the LORD gave him the punishment we deserved. He was painfully abused, but he did not complain. He was silent like a lamb being led to the butcher, as quiet as a sheep having its wool cut off. He was condemned to death without a fair trial. Who could have imagined what would happen to him? His life was taken away because of the sinful things my people had done. He wasn't dishonest or violent, but he was buried in a tomb of cruel and rich people. The LORD decided his servant would suffer as a sacrifice to take away the sin and guilt of others. Now the servant will live to see his own descendants. He did everything the LORD had planned. By suffering, the servant will learn the true meaning of obeying the LORD. Although he is innocent, he will take the punishment for the sins of others, so that many of them will no longer be guilty. The LORD will reward him with honor and power for sacrificing his life. Others thought he was a sinner, but he suffered for our sins and asked God to forgive us.” (Isa. 53:1-12)

If these prophecies are to have meaning, one would expect that the Messiah would be more than the average teacher in Israel. These descriptions lead to a very high view of the person of Jesus. He is described as mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, everlasting in his nature, dying because of the sin of mankind, and bringing forgiveness in a new covenant.

(Moreover, if one reads the entire chapter it is impossible that the passage could refer to Mohammed as some Muslim apologists have suggested.)

God's love is expressed in using a common person, Abraham, and his descendants to be the medium through whom the Messiah would come. God chose to use the humble, not the powerful and arrogant. The Messiah was born in Bethlehem during the reign of Herod the Great. Jesus declared that he had come to seek and save the lost. God's love was expressed in the most unusual way – He has come Himself in the human form of Jesus. Prophets were not enough. God came!!!

How does this play out in Scripture? It begins slowly to show in many ways that Jesus is God Incarnate. God seemed so distant to the Jews that it seemed incomprehensible that God should come "down."

The historical story of the Messiah's entry into Israel's life begins with Gabriel's announcement to Mary:

“One month later God sent the angel Gabriel to the town of Nazareth in Galilee with a message for a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to Joseph from the family of King David. The angel greeted Mary and said, "You are truly blessed! The Lord is with you." Mary was confused by the angel's words and wondered what they meant. Then the angel told Mary, "Don't be afraid! God is pleased with you, and you will have a son. His name will be Jesus. He will be great and will be called the **Son of God Most High**. The Lord God will make him king, as his ancestor David was. He will rule the people of Israel forever, and his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:26-33)

Before Jesus was born, Gabriel introduced the words, "Son of God Most High." His rule will never end, and his kingdom shall last forever. This was to be an extraordinary person. No other person will rule forever and no other kingdom will last forever.

A short time later Mary hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea. The greeting of Elizabeth was inspired by the Holy Spirit in asking the question: "Why should the Mother of My Lord come to me?" Even before Jesus was born there was the recognition that He was Lord.

“She went into Zechariah's home, where she greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, her baby moved within her. The Holy Spirit came upon Elizabeth. Then in a loud voice she said to Mary: God has blessed you more than any other woman! He has also blessed the child you will have. Why should **the mother of my Lord** come to me?” (Luke 1:40-43)

When Joseph, the husband to be, found that Mary was pregnant, he decided to divorce her. But an angel of the Lord appeared to him,

“While Joseph was thinking about this, an angel from the Lord came to him in a dream. The angel said, "Joseph, the baby that Mary will have is **from the Holy Spirit**. Go ahead and marry her. Then after her baby is born, name him Jesus, **because he will save his people from their sins**. So the Lord's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, "A virgin will have a baby boy, and he will be called **Immanuel**," **which means "God is with us."** After Joseph woke up, he and Mary were soon married, just as the Lord's angel had told him to do. But they did not sleep together before her baby was born. Then Joseph named him Jesus.” (Matt. 1:20-25)

The angel proclaimed the truth that Immanuel means God is with us. Only such a being could bring meaning to the phrase, "he will save his people from their sins." The prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7 indicated that the Messiah would be "God with us", and the message of the angel confirmed that Jesus was to be Immanuel – God with us. Jesus alone – without comparison – is said to be able to save people from their sins. He alone makes forgiveness possible. What kind of being is able to save people from their sins? Only God can forgive sins. Only God can save. The announcement of the angel and the declaration of Jesus himself affirm the claim to forgive sins because He is God with us, Immanuel.

At the birth of Jesus shepherds were in the fields with their sheep and an angel appeared to them. The angel's announcement was "He is Christ the Lord." This announcement is not about someone later in life, but at the very birth the angel's word was "Christ the Lord." He is not merely a prophet, a rabbi, or sage, but Lord!

“All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. **He is Christ the Lord.**” (Luke 2:9-11)

Not only angels were aware of who Jesus was, but visitors from afar came to his birth to worship Him. Wise men still worship Him.

“When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have **come to worship him**.” (Matt. 2:1-2)

They left for Bethlehem to find the child and brought him gifts fit for a King.

“When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and **worshipped him**. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him”. (Matt. 2:11)

Very little is told of the early life of Jesus. At the age of 12 he visited the temple in Jerusalem. He did not join the family in going home. They returned to Jerusalem to find him. The account of this is in Luke.

“Three days later they found Jesus sitting in the temple, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was surprised at how much he knew and at the answers he gave. When his parents found him, they were amazed. His mother said, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been very worried, and we have been searching for you!" Jesus answered, "Why did you have to look for me? Didn't you know that I would be in **my Father's house**?" (Luke 2:46-49)

Very early the relation to the Father is declared and it will be more widely explained as his life unfolds.

When his public ministry began, John the Baptist declared concerning Jesus,

“I baptize you with water so that you will give up your sins. But someone more powerful is going to come, and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit** and with fire.” (Matt. 3:11)

One of the early public events in Jesus life was his baptism by John. At that time we are told that "Jesus was baptized. And as soon as he came out of the water, the sky opened, and he saw the Spirit of God coming down on him like a dove. Then a voice from heaven said, "This is **my own dear Son**, and I am pleased with him.” (Matt. 3:16-17)

John declared the result of this experience after baptizing Jesus.

“The next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him and said: Here is the **Lamb of God** who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I told you about when I said, "Someone else will come. He is greater than I am, because **he was alive before I was born**." I didn't know who he was. But I came to baptize you with water, so that everyone in Israel would see him. I was there and saw the Spirit come down on him like a dove from heaven. And the Spirit stayed on him. Before this I didn't know who he was. But the one who sent me to baptize with water had told me, "You will see the Spirit come down and stay on someone. Then you will know that he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." I saw this happen, and I tell you that he is **the Son of God**.” (John 1:30-34)

Jesus began to call some disciples to his following. We read the following in the Gospel of John,

“Philip then found Nathanael and said, "We have found the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote about. He is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth." Nathanael asked, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Philip answered, "Come and see." When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said, "Here is a true descendant of our ancestor Israel. And he isn't deceitful." "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, "Before Philip called you, I saw you under the fig tree." Nathanael said, "Rabbi, you are **the Son of God** and the King of Israel!" Jesus answered, "Did you believe me just because I said that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see something even greater. I tell you for certain that you will see heaven open and God's angels going up and coming down on the Son of Man.” (John 1:45-51)

Jesus' comment that He saw Nathanael before Philip called him indicates his knowledge beyond mere human seeing. Moreover, being able to see into the human heart is something only God can do.

Jesus did his first of many miracles at Cana in Galilee at a wedding feast.

(A full listing of His miracles is at the end of this document.)

“Jesus told the servants to fill them to the top with water. Then after the jars had been filled, he said, “Now take some water and give it to the man in charge of the feast.” The servants did as Jesus told them, and the man in charge drank some of the water that had now turned into wine. He did not know where the wine had come from, but the servants did. He called the bridegroom over and said, “The best wine is always served first. Then after the guests have had plenty, the other wine is served. But you have kept the best until last!” This was Jesus’ first miracle, and he did it in the village of Cana in Galilee. There Jesus showed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.” (John 2:7-11)

This passage is important for several reasons. First, no human can change water into wine. This calls for a miracle and miracles only come by God’s power. Second, the Gnostic books claiming miracles on the part of Jesus as a boy contradict the Gospels which were written by eyewitnesses to Jesus’ life and claim that the first miracle was done at Cana when Jesus began his ministry as an adult. This causes the Christians to question the Qur’an’s dependence on the Gnostic stories. Third, how does one do a miracle? No human can do this. No human can change water into wine, heal the blind, the leper, the lame, the sick, or raise the dead.

These are not magical tricks, but real events that people observed. Even the enemies of Jesus knew something awesome had taken place, but attributed it to the power of the devil.

His respect for the Temple of God is indicated in his throwing the temple merchants out of the place of worship. This event also shows his claim of a special relation with the Father.

“So he took some rope and made a whip. Then he chased everyone out of the temple, together with their sheep and cattle. He turned over the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins. Jesus said to the people who had been selling doves, ‘Get those doves out of here! Don’t make my Father’s house a marketplace.’” (John 2:15-16)

The claim of identity with God grows as we see in the conversation with Nicodemus.

“Jesus replied: How can you be a teacher of Israel and not know these things? I tell you for certain that we know what we are talking about because we have seen it ourselves. But none of you will accept what we say. If you don’t believe when I talk to you about things on earth, how can you possibly believe if I talk to you about things in heaven? No one has gone up to heaven except **the Son of Man, who came down from there**. And the Son of Man must be lifted up, just as that metal snake was lifted up by Moses in the desert. Then everyone who has faith in the Son of Man will have eternal life.” (John 3:10-15)

John, the apostle, commented concerning the growing influence of Jesus:

“**God’s Son** comes from heaven and is above all others. Everyone who comes from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all others. He speaks about what he has seen and heard, and yet no one believes him. But everyone who does believe him has shown that God is truthful. The Son was sent to speak God’s message, and he has been given the full power of God’s Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has given him everything. Everyone who has faith in the Son has eternal life. But no one who rejects him will ever share in that life, and God will be angry with them forever.” (John 3:31-36)

The encounter with the woman at Jacob’s well indicates the profound ability to give eternal life. Who else but God could do this?

“Jesus answered, “You don’t know what God wants to give you, and you don’t know who is asking you for a drink. If you did, you would ask me for the water that gives life.” “Sir,” the woman said, “you don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get this life-giving water? Our ancestor Jacob dug this well for us, and his family and animals got water from it. Are you greater than Jacob?” Jesus answered, “Everyone

who drinks this water will get thirsty again. But no one who drinks the water I give will ever be thirsty again. **The water I give is like a flowing fountain that gives eternal life.**"" (John 4:10-14)

The woman knew something of a coming Messiah and said,

"I know that the Messiah will come. He is the one we call Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us." **"I am that one,"** Jesus told her, "and I am speaking to you now." (John 4:25-26)

Later many people believed in Jesus because of the words of the woman,

"A lot of Samaritans in that town **put their faith in Jesus** because the woman had said, "This man told me everything I have ever done." (John 4:39)

Who could have a knowledge of the inner being of a human? Only God knows our inner thoughts and motives.

Jesus did his second miracle in Cana also. A nobleman's son was ill and he feared that the boy would die.

"Jesus told the official, "You won't have faith unless you see miracles and wonders!" The man replied, "Lord, please come before my son dies!" Jesus then said, "Your son will live. Go on home to him." The man believed Jesus and started back home. Some of the official's servants met him along the road and told him, "Your son is better!" He asked them when the boy got better, and they answered, "The fever left him yesterday at one o'clock." The boy's father realized that at one o'clock the day before, Jesus had told him, "Your son will live!" So the man and everyone in his family put their faith in Jesus." (John 4:48-53)

Not everyone greeted Jesus with a warm welcome. When he preached against their unbelief they wanted to kill him.

"When the people in the meeting place heard Jesus say this, they became so angry that they got up and threw him out of town. They dragged him to the edge of the cliff on which the town was built, because they wanted to throw him down from there. But Jesus slipped through the crowd and got away." (Luke 4:28-30)

This may be compared to the appearance of Jesus after the resurrection when he appeared in the room when all the doors were locked. (John 20:19)

Not only was there angelic statements made concerning who Jesus was, but he was also recognized by the demonic beings. They knew about God's nature.

"In Capernaum, Jesus taught in the synagogue where a man with an evil spirit possessed him. He taught the people on the Sabbath. His teaching amazed them because he spoke with power. There in the Jewish meeting place was a man with an evil spirit. He yelled out, "Hey, Jesus of Nazareth, what do you want with us? Are you here to get rid of us? I know who you are! **You are God's Holy One.**" (Luke 4:31-34)

"Jesus left the meeting place and went to Simon's home. When Jesus got there, he was told that Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever. So Jesus went over to her and ordered the fever to go away. Right then she was able to get up and serve them a meal. After the sun had set, people with all kinds of diseases were brought to Jesus. He put his hands on each one of them and healed them. Demons went out of many people and shouted, **"You are the Son of God!"** But Jesus ordered the demons not to speak because they knew he was the Messiah." (Luke 4:38-41)

Miracles were not acts without real meaning for who he was. This is reflected in the following experience,

"Jesus went back to Capernaum, and a few days later people heard that he was at home. Then so many of them came to the house that there wasn't even standing room left in front of the door. Jesus was still teaching when four people came up, carrying a crippled man on a mat. But because of the crowd, they could not get him

to Jesus. So they made a hole in the roof above him and let the man down in front of everyone. When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the crippled man, "**My friend, your sins are forgiven.**" Some of the teachers of the Law of Moses were sitting there. They started wondering, "Why would he say such a thing? **He must think he is God! Only God can forgive sins.**" Right away, Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he said, "Why are you thinking such things? Is it easier for me to tell this crippled man that **his sins are forgiven or to tell him to get up and pick up his mat and go on home? I will show you that the Son of Man has the right to forgive sins here on earth.**" So Jesus said to the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and go on home." The man got right up. He picked up his mat and went out while everyone watched in amazement. They praised God and said, "We have never seen anything like this!" (Mark 2:1-12)

Who can forgive sins but God? If Jesus is not who He claimed to be, he is a huge fraud.

But his words were backed up with the change of the man's condition. He got up and walked.

The things that Jesus did were not appreciated by the Pharisees and this can be seen in the following scriptures where Jesus' comments are clearly understood and they charged him with blasphemy. The man was healed on a Sabbath. Jesus described his relation to the Father as consequential. Honoring the Son means honoring the Father. Dishonoring the Son dishonors the Father. This is seen in the passages to follow.

"They started making a lot of trouble for Jesus because he did things like this on the Sabbath. But Jesus said, "My Father has never stopped working, and that is why I keep on working." Now the leaders wanted to kill Jesus for two reasons. First, he had broken the law of the Sabbath. But even worse, **he had said that God was his Father, which made him equal with God.** Jesus told the people: I tell you for certain that the Son cannot do anything on his own. He can do only what he sees the Father doing, and he does exactly what he sees the Father do. The Father loves the Son and has shown him everything he does. The Father will show him even greater things, and you will be amazed. Just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants to. The Father doesn't judge anyone, but he has made his Son the judge of everyone. The Father wants all people to honor the Son as much as they honor him. **When anyone refuses to honor the Son, that is the same as refusing to honor the Father who sent him. I tell you for certain that everyone who hears my message and has faith in the one who sent me has eternal life and will never be condemned. They have already gone from death to life.** I tell you for certain that the time will come, and it is already here, when all of the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen to it will live! The Father has the power to give life, and he has given that same power to the Son. And he has given his Son the right to judge everyone, because he is the Son of Man. Don't be surprised! The time will come when all of the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they will come out of their graves. Everyone who has done good things will rise to life, but everyone who has done evil things will rise and be condemned. I cannot do anything on my own. The Father sent me, and he is the one who told me how to judge. I judge with fairness, because I obey him, and I don't just try to please myself." (John 5:16-30)

"John was a lamp that gave a lot of light, and you were glad to enjoy his light for a while. But something more important than John speaks for me. I mean the things that the Father has given me to do! All of these speak for me and prove that the Father sent me. The Father who sent me also speaks for me, but you have never heard his voice or seen him face to face. You have not believed his message, because you refused to have faith in the one he sent. You search the Scriptures, because you think you will find eternal life in them. **The Scriptures tell about me, but you refuse to come to me for eternal life.** I don't care about human praise, but I do know that none of you love God. I have come with my Father's authority, and you have not welcomed me. But you will welcome people who come on their own. How could you possibly believe? You like to have your friends praise you, and you don't care about praise that the only God can give! Don't think that I will be the one to accuse you to the Father. You have put your hope in Moses, yet he is the very one who will accuse you. Moses wrote about me, and if you had believed Moses, you would have believed me. But if you don't believe what Moses wrote, how can you believe what I say?" (John 5:35-47)

Three references are made here: 1) the works he did, 2) the Scripture refers to him, and 3) the testimony of the Father, "This is my beloved son." Eternal life hangs in the balance of coming to Jesus or not coming to Him.

In his teachings Jesus broke through the legalistic views of the Scribes and Pharisees and got to the inner meaning of the Law.

“Don't suppose that I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to **give them their full meaning**. Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you that not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen. If you reject even the least important command in the Law and teach others to do the same, you will be the least important person in the kingdom of heaven. But if you obey and teach others its commands, you will have an important place in the kingdom. You must obey God's commands better than the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law obey them. If you don't, I promise you that you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:17-20)

The sermon on the mount goes to the real meaning of the laws.

Not only should you not kill, you should not hate, or be angry. Not only should you not commit adultery, you should not lust after women. Not only should you not seek revenge, but you should turn the cheek also. Praying for your enemies is commanded. But embedded in the Sermon are the phrases, "you have heard it said," "But I say unto you." Jesus claims authority to bring the deeper meaning of the law to his hearers. He is the Second Lawgiver superceding Moses.

Jesus claims to know what the Father will do in terms of prayer.

“Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks will receive. Everyone who searches will find. And the door will be opened for everyone who knocks. Would any of you give your hungry child a stone, if the child asked for some bread? Would you give your child a snake if the child asked for a fish? As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give good things to people who ask. Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about.” (Matt. 7:7-12)

Jesus also warned about false prophets who would lead people astray.

“Watch out for false prophets! They dress up like sheep, but inside they are wolves who have come to attack you. You can tell what they are by what they do. No one picks grapes or figs from thorn bushes. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot produce good fruit. Every tree that produces bad fruit will be chopped down and burned. You can tell who the false prophets are by their deeds”. (Matt. 7:15-20)

False prophets reject the words of Jesus. False prophets claim rules that are self-serving, fulfilling their own lusts for women, money, and power. False prophets claim to have a message from God but are only deceiving people. Many false prophets since Jesus' time have instituted polygamy fulfilling their own lusts.

Jesus has authority concerning who is going to the kingdom of heaven.

“Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!” (Matt. 7:21-23)

For life right now, **the words of Jesus must be accepted or the alternative is destruction**. This is not what God will do to me, but what I will do to myself in turning away from the only source of life. If I reject Life, what else is there but isolation from God?

“Anyone who hears and obeys these teachings of mine is like a wise person who built a house on solid rock. Rain poured down, rivers flooded, and winds beat against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on solid rock. Anyone who hears my teachings and doesn't obey them is like a foolish person who built a house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and beat against that house. Finally, it fell

with a crash. When Jesus finished speaking, the crowds were surprised at his teaching. He taught them like someone with authority, and not like their teachers of the Law of Moses.” (Matt. 7:24-29)

People recognized that Jesus was extraordinary.

“When Jesus was going into the town of Capernaum, an army officer came up to him and said, "Lord, my servant is at home in such terrible pain that he can't even move." "I will go and heal him," Jesus replied. But the officer said, "Lord, I'm not good enough for you to come into my house. Just give the order, and my servant will get well.” (Matt. 8:5-8)

To prove His claim to be the promised Messiah Jesus showed how his life, especially his miracles, were, even at that very time, fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies of what the Messiah would be like and what he would do. When the disciples of John the Baptist were sent to Jesus by John to ask Him if he was truly the Messiah, "Jesus was at that very time healing many people who were sick or in pain or were troubled by evil spirits, and he was giving sight to a lot of blind people." And so he replied to John's messengers by quoting from Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6; 61:1 identifying Himself as the Messiah in Isaiah's prophecy.

“Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. Blind people are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People who have leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can now hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news. God will bless everyone who doesn't reject me because of what I do.” (Luke 7:21-23)

As time went on Jesus disclosed more of Himself to the disciples.

“At that moment Jesus said: My Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I am grateful that you hid all this from wise and educated people and showed it to ordinary people.

Yes, Father, that is what pleased you. My Father has given me everything, and he is the only one who knows the Son. **The only one who truly knows the Father is the Son.** But the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so that they can know him too. If you are tired from carrying heavy burdens, come to me and I will give you rest. Take the yoke I give you. Put it on your shoulders and learn from me. I am gentle and humble, and you will find rest. This yoke is easy to bear, and this burden is light.” (Matt. 11:25-30)

Another occasion in which He declared forgiveness was to a woman who had a bad reputation and had come to Simon's house. Jesus said concerning her,

“He turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Have you noticed this woman? When I came into your home, you didn't give me any water so I could wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn't even pour olive oil on my head, but she has poured expensive perfume on my feet. So I tell you that all her sins are forgiven, and that is why she has shown great love. But anyone who has been forgiven for only a little will show only a little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, **"Your sins are forgiven."** Some other guests started saying to one another, "Who is this who dares to forgive sins?" But Jesus told the woman, "Because of your faith, you are now saved. May God give you peace!" (Luke 7:44-50)

Again the issue is stressed: only God can forgive sins. Was Jesus wrong? Or Was He really God in the flesh? The answer of the Gospels is that He is truly the Son of God.

Jesus talked about sin and the problem of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

He told the Pharisees,

“But when I force out demons by the power of God's Spirit, it proves that God's kingdom has already come to you. How can anyone break into a strong man's house and steal his things, unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can take everything. If you are not on my side, you are against me. If you don't gather in the harvest with me, you scatter it. I tell you that any sinful thing you do or say can be forgiven. Even if you

speak against the Son of Man, you can be forgiven. But if you speak against the Holy Spirit, you can never be forgiven, either in this life or in the life to come.” (Matt. 12:28-31)

Speaking against the Holy Spirit is a grave sin and is unforgivable. Passages like this brought people to conclude for a Trinitarian view of the nature of God. We have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the angel Gabriel as some have believed falsely.

As time went on Jesus explained the Kingdom of heaven in parables.

“After Jesus left the crowd and went inside, his disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the story about the weeds in the wheat field." Jesus answered: **The one who scattered the good seed is the Son of Man.** The field is the world, and the good seeds are the people who belong to the kingdom. The weed seeds are those who belong to the evil one, and the one who scattered them is the devil. The harvest is the end of time, and angels are the ones who bring in the harvest. Weeds are gathered and burned. That's how it will be at the end of time. **The Son of Man will send out his angels**, and they will gather from his kingdom everyone who does wrong or causes others to sin. Then he will throw them into a flaming furnace, where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain. But everyone who has done right will shine like the sun in their Father's kingdom. If you have ears, pay attention!” (Matt 13:36-43)

Here Jesus is saying that He is the person who will send his angels to bring judgment. He has the authority to judge, the authority to forgive sins, and his words bring everlasting life.

Jesus did many miracles, healing the sick, blind, lame, dumb, and casting out demons who possessed people, and in addition displayed his power over the natural world. This is seen in the following story in which Jesus was asleep in the boat crossing the lake and a storm arose.

“... so the disciples went over to him and woke him up. They said, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" But Jesus replied, "Why are you so afraid? You surely don't have much faith." Then he got up and ordered the wind and the waves to calm down. And everything was calm. The men in the boat were amazed and said, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him." After Jesus had crossed the lake, he came to shore near the town of Gadara and started down the road. Two men with demons in them came to him from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one could travel that way. Suddenly they shouted, "**Jesus, Son of God**, what do you want with us? Have you come to punish us before our time?"” (Matt. 8:25-29)

“As Jesus was walking along, two blind men began following him and shouting, "Son of David, have pity on us!" After Jesus had gone indoors, the two blind men came up to him. He asked them, "Do you believe I can make you well?" "Yes, Lord," they answered. Jesus touched their eyes and said, "**Because of your faith, you will be healed.**" They were able to see, and Jesus strictly warned them not to tell anyone about him. But they left and talked about him to everyone in that part of the country. As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, some people brought to him a man who could not talk because a demon was in him. **After Jesus had forced the demon out, the man started talking.** The crowds were so amazed that they began saying, "Nothing like this has ever happened in Israel!"” (Matt. 9:27-33)

Jesus is the way to everlasting life. If we reject Him, we reject God.

“If you tell others that you belong to me, I will tell my Father in heaven that you are my followers. But if you reject me, I will tell my Father in heaven that you don't belong to me.” (Matt. 10:32-33)

The experience of seeing Jesus walk on the water led his disciples to affirm his true nature.

“Peter replied, "Lord, if it is really you, tell me to come to you on the water." "Come on!" Jesus said. Peter then got out of the boat and started walking on the water toward him. But when Peter saw how strong the wind was, he was afraid and started sinking. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted. Right away, Jesus reached out his hand. He helped Peter up and said, "You surely don't have much faith. Why do you doubt?" When Jesus and Peter got into

the boat, the wind died down. The men in the boat worshiped Jesus and said, "**You really are the Son of God!**" (Matt. 14:28-33)

After the miraculous feeding of the 5000 men plus women and children, Jesus spoke about the event.

"Jesus answered, 'I tell you for certain that you are not looking for me because you saw the miracles, but because you ate all the food you wanted. Don't work for food that spoils. Work for food that gives eternal life. The Son of Man will give you this food, because God the Father has given him the right to do so.' "What exactly does God want us to do?" the people asked. Jesus answered, "**God wants you to have faith in the one he sent.**" (John 6:26-29)

"And the bread that God gives is the one who came down from heaven to give life to the world." The people said, "Lord, give us this bread and don't ever stop!" Jesus replied: I am the bread that gives life! No one who comes to me will ever be hungry. No one who has faith in me will ever be thirsty. I have told you already that you have seen me and still do not have faith in me. Everything and everyone that the Father has given me will come to me, and I won't turn any of them away. I didn't come from heaven to do what I want! I came to do what the Father wants me to do. He sent me, and he wants to make certain that none of the ones he has given me will be lost. Instead, he wants me to raise them to life on the last day. **My Father wants everyone who sees the Son to have faith in him and to have eternal life. Then I will raise them to life on the last day.** The people started grumbling because Jesus had said he was the bread that had come down from heaven." (John 6:33-41)

"The only one who has seen the Father is the one who has come from him. No one else has ever seen the Father. I tell you for certain that everyone who has faith in me has eternal life. I am the bread that gives life! Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, and later they died. But the bread from heaven has come down, so that no one who eats it will ever die. I am that bread from heaven! Everyone who eats it will live forever. My flesh is the life-giving bread that I give to the people of this world." (John 6:46-51)

Jesus declared that his references to eating his flesh were spiritual, not literal.

"It is the Spirit that makes alive, the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and are life." (John 6:63)

"Some people were offended by Jesus' claim to be the Bread of Heaven and left Him. He turned to the disciples and asked, 'will you turn back?' Simon Peter answered, 'Lord, there is no one else that we can go to! Your words give eternal life. We have faith in you, and **we are sure that you are God's Holy One.**'" (John 6:68-69)

Faith in Jesus brought results. This is seen in the unusual story when Jesus left and went to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. As the Messiah he came to the people of Israel and the command to go to all nations had not been given yet. As a non-Jew the woman had no claim on the Messiah. In spite of this she had a tremendous faith that Jesus could heal her daughter and persisted in her appeal because of her faith.

"Suddenly a Canaanite woman from there came out shouting, 'Lord and Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is full of demons.' Jesus did not say a word. But the woman kept following along and shouting, so his disciples came up and asked him to send her away. Jesus said, 'I was sent only to the people of Israel! They are like a flock of lost sheep.' The woman came closer. Then she knelt down and begged, 'Please help me, Lord!' Jesus replied, 'It isn't right to take food away from children and feed it to dogs.' 'Lord, that's true,' the woman said, 'but even dogs get the crumbs that fall from their owner's table.' Jesus answered, 'Dear woman, you really do have a lot of faith, and you will be given what you want.' At that moment **her daughter was healed.**" (Matt 15:22-28)

The process of learning on the part of the disciples as Jesus revealed Himself to them led to a remarkable confession./p>

“When Jesus and his disciples were near the town of Caesarea Philippi, he asked them, “What do people say about the Son of Man?” The disciples answered, “Some people say you are John the Baptist or maybe Elijah or Jeremiah or some other prophet.” Then Jesus asked them, “But who do you say I am?” Simon Peter spoke up, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus told him: Simon, son of Jonah, you are blessed! You didn’t discover this on your own. It was shown to you by my Father in heaven.”**” (Matt.16:13-17)

This not only asserts that Peter confesses Jesus as the Son of the living God, but also show Jesus Himself confirmed this confession as brought about by His Father in heaven. Moreover, it gives the disciples the awesome responsibility of proclaiming this good news. The Messiah has come in the person of Jesus, the Son of God. Because of the importance of the work the disciples were given of spreading the good news of salvation through Christ to all the world they were given a very special revelation.

“Six days later Jesus took Peter and the brothers James and John with him. They went up on a very high mountain where they could be alone. There in front of the disciples, Jesus was completely changed. His face was shining like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. All at once Moses and Elijah were there talking with Jesus. So Peter said to him, “Lord, it is good for us to be here! Let us make three shelters, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While Peter was still speaking, the shadow of a bright cloud passed over them. From the cloud a voice said, **“This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him. Listen to what he says!”**” (Matt. 17:1-5)

Jesus told his disciples that real life was to be found in Him.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: If any of you want to be my followers, you must forget about yourself. You must take up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life, you will destroy it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find it. What will you gain, if you own the whole world but destroy yourself? What would you give to get back your soul?” (Matt.16:24-26)

With their faith established in Him, Jesus began to tell them of the coming events of his death on the cross. The event of the crucifixion is most basic to the entire message of the New Testament. This passage saying that Jesus would be killed and rise three days later is therefore central to all the other teachings of the entire New Testament.

I am very aware of the Muslim teaching that someone else was crucified in the place of Jesus. This teaching denies all the statements of Jesus Himself and the teaching of the apostles who were eyewitnesses and appointed by Jesus to tell the truth of what they had learned from Him and witnessed of Him to all the world. It is impossible for the Christian to understand how the Muslims can claim Jesus as a mighty and true prophet and not believe all that He taught about Himself and the obvious purpose of his whole life at the same time.

“Jesus left with his disciples and started through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know about it, because he was teaching the disciples that the Son of Man would be handed over to people who would kill him. But three days later he would rise to life. The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant, and they were afraid to ask.” (Mark 9:30-32)

In preparation for his departure after the resurrection, Jesus taught his followers some basic ideas, the first is about prayer. Not only did he teach them the model prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, but he gave this additional comfort in prayer.

“I promise that when any two of you on earth agree about something you are praying for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you.” (Matt 18:19-20)

As hostility mounted toward Jesus he defended His teaching in various ways:

1. "When the festival was about half over, Jesus went into the temple and started teaching. The leaders were surprised and said, "How does this man know so much? He has never been taught!" Jesus replied: I am not

teaching something that I thought up. What I teach comes from the one who sent me. **If you really want to obey God, you will know if what I teach comes from God or from me.** If I wanted to bring honor to myself, I would speak for myself. But I want to honor the one who sent me. That is why I tell the truth and not a lie.” (John 7:14-18)

2. "As Jesus was teaching in the temple, he shouted, "Do you really think you know me and where I came from? I didn't come on my own! The one who sent me is truthful, and you don't know him. But I know the one who sent me, **because I came from him.**"” (John 7:28-29)

3. "On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted, "If you are thirsty, come to me and drink! **Have faith in me, and you will have life-giving water** flowing from deep inside you, just as the Scriptures say." **Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit**, who would be given to everyone that had faith in him. The Spirit had not yet been given to anyone, since Jesus had not yet been given his full glory.” (John 7:37-39)

Jesus’ words give us insight into the relationship of the Father and the Son. In a number of passages that follow Jesus talks about his relationship with the Father. If you know the Son you know the Father also. You **cannot know** the Father without knowing the Son.

“If I did judge, I would judge fairly, because I would not be doing it alone. The Father who sent me is here with me. Your Law requires two witnesses to prove that something is true. I am one of my witnesses, and the Father who sent me is the other one. "Where is your Father?" they asked. "You don't know me or my Father!" **Jesus answered. "If you knew me, you would know my Father."** (John 8:16-19)

“Jesus answered, "You are from below, but I am from above. You belong to this world, but I don't. That is why I said you will die with your sins unforgiven. **If you don't have faith in me for who I am, you will die, and your sins will not be forgiven.**"” (John 8:23-24)

“No one understood that Jesus was talking to them about the Father. Jesus went on to say, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you will know who I am. You will also know that I don't do anything on my own. I say only what my Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me. I always do what pleases him, and he will never leave me.” (John 8:27-28)

“Jesus told the people who had faith in him, "If you keep on obeying what I have said, you truly are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:31-32)

“Jesus answered: **If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God and only from him. He sent me. I did not come on my own.**” (John 8:42)

“I don't want honor for myself. But there is one who wants me to be honored, and he is also the one who judges.” (John 8:50)

In honoring the Son we honor the Father. If we do not honor the Son we dishonor the Father.

“Jesus replied, "If I honored myself, it would mean nothing. My Father is the one who honors me. You claim that he is your God, even though you don't really know him. If I said I didn't know him, I would be a liar, just like all of you. But I know him, and I do what he says. Your father Abraham was really glad to see me." "You are not even fifty years old!" they said. "How could you have seen Abraham?" **Jesus answered, "I tell you for certain that even before Abraham was, I was, and I am."** (John 8:54-58)

Jesus claimed his existence with the Father before the Incarnation. The words "I am" are also related to the name of God in Exodus 3, the name of Yahweh, translated often as "I am that I am." Because He claimed existence before Abraham, claiming the relation to the Father, they picked up stones to kill him, but he walked through the midst of them and passed by.

“As long as it is day, we must do what the one who sent me wants me to do. When night comes, no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light for the world.” (John 9:4-5)

Jesus as the Light of the world may be compared to the Sun in our perspective. One cannot look at the sun, but by means of it we can see everything else. Jesus as the Son gives us a perspective on reality that cannot be found apart from Him.

The man healed of blindness asks the Pharisees,

““How strange!” the man replied. “He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from. We know that God listens only to people who love and obey him. God doesn't listen to sinners. And this is the first time in history that anyone has ever given sight to someone born blind. **Jesus could not do anything unless he came from God.**”” (John 9:30-33)

When the healed blind man later encountered Jesus,

“When Jesus heard what had happened, he went and found the man. Then Jesus asked, “Do you have faith in the Son of Man?” He replied, “Sir, if you will tell me who he is, I will put my faith in him.” **“You have already seen him,” Jesus answered, “and right now he is talking with you.”** The man said, “Lord, I put my faith in you!” Then he worshiped Jesus.” (John 9:35-38)

Being a devout Jew he would not have worshipped a mere man. But learning that He was the Son of God, he fell down and worshipped Him.

“Jesus told him, **“I came to judge the people of this world.** I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see.” (John 9:39)

Jesus’ first mission was to seek and save the lost. The blind man found the Messiah and was welcomed into the kingdom of God. The flip side of the coin is that those who claimed to be able to see were really blind.

Jesus talked about being the good shepherd,

“Jesus said: I tell you for certain that I am the gate for the sheep. Everyone who came before me was a thief or a robber, and the sheep did not listen to any of them. I am the gate. All who come in through me will be saved. Through me they will come and go and find pasture. A thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I came so that everyone would have life, and have it in its fullest. **I am the good shepherd, and the good shepherd gives up his life for his sheep.** Hired workers are not like the shepherd. They don't own the sheep, and when they see a wolf coming, they run off and leave the sheep. Then the wolf attacks and scatters the flock. Hired workers run away because they don't care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me. **Just as the Father knows me, I know the Father, and I give up my life for my sheep**.” (John 10:8-15)

It was the purpose of the Father from beginning that the Son should come and give his life for the sheep. Over and over again Jesus tells his disciples that he has come to give his life for us.

“**The Father loves me, because I give up my life, so that I may receive it back again. No one takes my life from me.** I give it up willingly! I have the power to give it up and the power to receive it back again, just as my Father commanded me to do.” (John 19:17-18)

It is no surprise to Jesus that his life is to be taken by crucifixion. Before he was crucified he claimed that he could prevent it by calling down angels on his behalf. But that was not his purpose in coming to earth.

“One day he was walking in that part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch, and the people gathered all around him. They said, “How long are you going to keep us guessing? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly!” Jesus answered: I have told you, and you refused to believe me. **The things I do by my Father's authority show who I am.** But since you are not my sheep, you don't believe me. My sheep know my voice, and I know

them. They follow me, and **I give them eternal life**, so that they will never be lost. No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father gave them to me, and he is greater than all others. No one can snatch them from his hands, and **I am one with the Father**. Once again the Jewish leaders picked up stones in order to kill Jesus. But he said, "I have shown you many good things that my Father sent me to do. Which one are you going to stone me for?" They answered, "We are not stoning you because of any good thing you did. We are stoning you because you did a terrible thing. **You are just a man, and here you are claiming to be God!**" (John 10:28-33)

The works that Jesus did show who he was. The power to heal the blind, the lame, and the leper as well as raise people from the dead show who Jesus really is. The phrase that he is one with the Father is repeated a number of times in the Gospels.

"If I don't do as my Father does, you should not believe me. But if I do what my Father does, you should believe because of that, even if you don't have faith in me. Then you will know for certain that **the Father is one with me, and I am one with the Father**." (John 10:37-38)

The works that Jesus did were deeds of compassion. These were the deeds prophesied about the Messiah in the Old Testament prophets. They were not deeds designed to bring about evil powers for evil people. These were the deeds that Jesus reminded the followers of John the Baptist that the Messiah would do.

"At that same time, Jesus felt the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, and he said: My Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I am grateful that you hid all this from wise and educated people and showed it to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that is what pleased you. My Father has given me everything, and he is the only one who knows the Son. **The only one who really knows the Father is the Son. But the Son wants to tell others about the Father**, so that they can know him too. Jesus then turned to his disciples and said to them in private, "You are really blessed to see what you see!" (Luke 10:21-23)

The Infinite God is so vast, so immense, so above our understanding that we will never fully understand God even in eternity. We will always know the Father through the Son who has come to us in a form that we can grasp. The wonderful news is that the Son wants to tell us about the Father. We are truly blessed by the Incarnation.

"As bad as you are, you still know how to give good gifts to your children. But your heavenly Father is even more ready to give **the Holy Spirit** to anyone who asks." (Luke 11:13)

Here is another reference that brought believers to think in terms of the Triune nature of God.

"If you tell others that you belong to me, the Son of Man will tell God's angels that you are my followers. But if you reject me, you will be rejected in front of them." (Luke 12:8-9)

The many references to Jesus judging re-affirm the importance of commitment to Him as the Son of God, one with the Father.

The Raising of Lazarus.

"A man by the name of Lazarus was sick in the village of Bethany. He had two sisters, Mary and Martha. This was the same Mary who later poured perfume on the Lord's head and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent a message to the Lord and told him that his good friend Lazarus was sick. When Jesus heard this, he said, "His sickness won't end in death. It will bring glory to God and his Son." (John 11:1-4)

It was through the death of Lazarus that Jesus re-affirmed his mission as Messiah so that the raising of Lazarus would show Him to be the Son of God with power.

"Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" Martha answered, "I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised." Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die.

Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord!" she replied. "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world." (John 11:23-27)

The claim of Jesus to be the resurrection and the life is bold and far-reaching. Why would he claim such if He could not fulfill the claim? Martha believed that he was the Messiah, the Son of God, and Lazarus was raised to life. How much better to rise to everlasting life!

There is warning about the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age.

"So always be ready! You don't know when the Son of Man will come" (Luke 12:40)

This is a stark warning to everyone that no one knows when Jesus will return. People who have set dates, Jehovah's Witnesses and others, have paid no attention to these words to their own shame.

"Jesus said to his disciples: The time will come when you will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, but you will not. When people say to you, "Look there," or "Look here," don't go looking for him. The day of the Son of Man will be like lightning flashing across the sky. But first he must suffer terribly and be rejected by the people of today" (Luke 17:22-25)

The return of Jesus will be as lightening flashing from one side of the heavens to the other. All eyes shall be able to see Him. The fact that He will return is a bold claim made by no other person. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, etc. are dead. There is no possibility of their coming in the way that Jesus declares concerning Himself. But before he was to leave, he would suffer many things such as the crucifixion and rejection.

"The same will happen on the day when the Son of Man appears. At that time no one on a roof top should go down into the house to get anything. No one in a field should go back to the house for anything." (Luke 17:30-31)

When Jesus returns there will be no need to go about ordinary duties, all things will be new.

"Peter replied, "Remember, we have left everything to be your followers! What will we get?" Jesus answered: Yes, all of you have become my followers. And so in the future world, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, I promise that you will sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. All who have given up home or brothers and sisters or father and mother or children or land for me will be given a hundred times as much. They will also have eternal life." (Matt. 19:27-29)

This paragraph affirms that Jesus will return and forsaking all for Him is better than keeping everything without Him. The blessing of the presence of Christ far outshines the 'stuff' we frequently pursue. The real reward is the gift of everlasting life.

Announcement of his death and resurrection.

"The disciples were confused as Jesus led them toward Jerusalem, and his other followers were afraid. Once again, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside and told them what was going to happen to him. He said: We are now on our way to Jerusalem where the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses. They will sentence him to death and hand him over to foreigners, who will make fun of him and spit on him. They will beat him and kill him. But three days later he will rise to life." (Mark 10:32-34)

Jesus plainly tells the disciples what is going to happen to Him. He will be condemned to death, scourged, mocked, and then killed on a cross outside Jerusalem. But the good news is that in three days he shall rise again. Easter is a day of celebration after a black Friday.

"If you want to be great, you must be the servant of all the others. And if you want to be first, you must be everyone's slave. The Son of Man did not come to be a slave master, but a slave who will give his life to rescue many people." (Mark 10:43-45)

The first coming of the Messiah was a lowly role of servant and model. This theme began with the birth of Jesus in the angelic declaration that He shall save His people from their sins. He gave His life for mankind. This is also seen in the following story of Zacchaeus.

“Later that day Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “I will give half of my property to the poor. And I will now pay back four times as much to everyone I have ever cheated.” Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today you and your family have been saved, because you are a true son of Abraham. **The Son of Man came to look for and to save people who are lost.**” (Luke 19:8-10)

The mission of Jesus is expressed in seeking and saving the lost. Jesus did something that no other religious leader can claim. Buddha did nothing but teach, Confucius did nothing but teach an ethic, Mohammed did nothing but teach and coerce people into believing in his religion, Hinduism does nothing for anyone but teach a way of life. The phrase, “Jesus saves” really refers to something He did in dying on the cross and rising from the grave. By faith in Him He gives eternal life. The last supper before Jesus’ crucifixion gives the basis of a new covenant guaranteeing forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

“Jesus said: The time has come for the Son of Man to be given his glory. I tell you for certain that a grain of wheat that falls on the ground will never be more than one grain unless it dies. But if it dies, it will produce lots of wheat. If you love your life, you will lose it. If you give it up in this world, you will be given eternal life. If you serve me, you must go with me. My servants will be with me wherever I am. If you serve me, my Father will honor you. Now I am deeply troubled, and I don't know what to say. But I must not ask my Father to keep me from this time of suffering. In fact, I came into the world to suffer. So Father, bring glory to yourself. A voice from heaven then said, “I have already brought glory to myself, and I will do it again!” (John 12:23-28)

Jesus used an example of his dying comparing it to the necessity for the grain of wheat to fall into the earth and die. If it did not die it would not bear fruit. His death is a meaningful death. He bore fruit. His death established the New Covenant giving to us the gift of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness along with the gift of everlasting life.

“When the crowd heard the voice, some of them thought it was thunder. Others thought an angel had spoken to Jesus. Then Jesus told the crowd, “That voice spoke to help you, not me. This world's people are now being judged, and the ruler of this world is already being thrown out! If I am lifted up above the earth, I will make everyone want to come to me.” Jesus was talking about the way he would be put to death.” (John 12:29-33)

The death of Jesus fulfills the Genesis prophecy about the judgment on Satan. His death seals the ultimate doom of Satan.

The Union of the Father and the Son.

“In a loud voice Jesus said: Everyone who has faith in me also has faith in the one who sent me. And everyone who has seen me has seen the one who sent me. I am the light that has come into the world. No one who has faith in me will stay in the dark. I am not the one who will judge those who refuse to obey my teachings. I came to save the people of this world, not to be their judge. But everyone who rejects me and my teachings will be judged on the last day by what I have said. I don't speak on my own. I say only what the Father who sent me has told me to say. I know that his commands will bring eternal life. That is why I tell you exactly what the Father has told me.” (John 12:44-50)

Again, the union of the Father and the Son is declared in this paragraph. If we know Jesus we know the Father. Jesus came to save not to judge, but he will come again as judge. Jesus spoke the Message His Father wanted us to hear.

“Jesus then told them this story: A farmer once planted a vineyard. He built a wall around it and dug a pit to crush the grapes in. He also built a lookout tower. Then he rented out his vineyard and left the country. When it was harvest time, he sent a servant to get his share of the grapes. The renters grabbed the servant. They beat him up and sent him away without a thing. The owner sent another servant, but the renters beat him on the head and

insulted him terribly. Then the man sent another servant, and they killed him. He kept sending servant after servant. They beat some of them and killed others. The owner had a son he loved very much. Finally, he sent his son to the renters because he thought they would respect him. But they said to themselves, "Someday he will own this vineyard. Let's kill him! That way we can have it all for ourselves." So they grabbed the owner's son and killed him. Then they threw his body out of the vineyard. Jesus asked, "What do you think the owner of the vineyard will do? He will come and kill those renters and let someone else have his vineyard. You surely know that the Scriptures say, 'The stone that the builders tossed aside is now the most important stone of all. This is something the Lord has done, and it is amazing to us.' " The leaders knew that Jesus was really talking about them, and they wanted to arrest him. But because they were afraid of the crowd, they let him alone and left." (Mark 12:1-12)

The parable speaks of God creating, choosing the Hebrews as his leaseholders and when the prophets who came to collect the rent were killed, God sent his Son to collect the rent and they killed Him.

Who is the Christ?

"While the Pharisees were still there, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose family will he come from?" They answered, "He will be a son of King David." Jesus replied, "How then could the Spirit lead David to call the Messiah his Lord? David said, 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right side until I make your enemies into a footstool for you.' If David called the Messiah his Lord, how can the Messiah be a son of King David?" No one was able to give Jesus an answer, and from that day on, no one dared ask him any more questions." (Matt. 22:41-46)

In the human sense, the Messiah was David's son, but in the divine sense the Messiah was David's Lord. The first "Lord" refers to the Father and the second "Lord" refers to the Messiah.

"But none of you should be called a teacher. You have only one teacher, and all of you are like brothers and sisters. Don't call anyone on earth your father. All of you have the same Father in heaven. None of you should be called the leader. The Messiah is your only leader. Whoever is the greatest should be the servant of the others." (Matt. 23:8-11)

This is in considerable contrast to Mohammed who was served by his people, receiving 20 percent of all booty taken in conquests, the choice women he wanted, and the privilege of power.

Jesus talked about the time of his return and warned about false prophets.

"Someone may say, 'Here is the Messiah!' or 'There he is!' But don't believe it. False messiahs and false prophets will come and work great miracles and signs. They will even try to fool God's chosen ones. But I have warned you ahead of time. If you are told that the Messiah is out in the desert, don't go there! And if you are told that he is in some secret place, don't believe it! The coming of the **Son of Man** will be like lightning that can be seen from east to west." (Matt. 24:23-27)

"Then a sign will appear in the sky. And there will be the Son of Man. All nations on earth will weep when they see the **Son of Man** coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. At the sound of a loud trumpet, he will send his angels to bring his chosen ones together from all over the earth." (Matt. 24:30-31)

"Always be ready! You don't know when the **Son of Man** will come. Who are faithful and wise servants? Who are the ones the master will put in charge of giving the other servants their food supplies at the proper time? Servants are fortunate if their master comes and finds them doing their job." (Matt. 24:44-46)

"When the **Son of Man** comes in his glory with all of his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created.' (Matt. 25:31-34)

The passages referring to the return of Jesus is set over against the humble first coming.

He came as a servant, he will return as King and judge. He came with little fanfare, He will return with the sound of a trumpet and power and great glory. He came as proclaimer of the Kingdom of God where people can experience forgiveness, he will return as judge against people who rejected forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

More warnings about his coming crucifixion and death.

“When Jesus had finished teaching, he told his disciples, "You know that two days from now will be Passover. That is when the **Son of Man** will be handed over to his enemies and nailed to a cross.” (Matt. 26:1-2)

This is one more statement from Jesus that he would be crucified, not somebody else as the Qur'an claims. All of non-Muslim history is against the Muslim claim that somebody other than Jesus was crucified. Roman, Jewish, and Christian documents support the fact of Jesus' crucifixion. These are documents close to the time of Jesus, not 500 years later.

“Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he said: Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing for me. You will always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me. **She has poured perfume on my body to prepare it for burial.** You may be sure that wherever the good news is told all over the world, people will remember what she has done. And they will tell others.” (Matt. 26:10-13)

The humility of Jesus is described by his actions as well as words.

“Who do people think is the greatest, a person who is served or one who serves? Isn't it the one who is served? But I have been with you as a servant. You have stayed with me in all my troubles. So I will give you the right to rule as kings, just as my Father has given me the right to rule as a king. You will eat and drink with me in my kingdom, and you will each sit on a throne to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22:27-30)

“After Jesus had washed his disciples' feet and had put his outer garment back on, he sat down again. Then he said: Do you understand what I have done? **You call me your teacher and Lord, and you should, because that is who I am. And if your Lord and teacher has washed your feet, you should do the same for each other.** I have set the example, and you should do for each other exactly what I have done for you. I tell you for certain that servants are not greater than their master, and messengers are not greater than the one who sent them.” (John 13:12-16)

This passage illustrates the graciousness of God who comes in humility in the Incarnation. It is a lesson for the disciples as well as all followers since that time.

“I am not talking about all of you. I know the ones I have chosen. But what the Scriptures say must come true. And they say, "The man who ate with me has turned against me!" I am telling you this before it all happens. **Then when it does happen, you will believe who I am.** I tell you for certain that anyone who welcomes my messengers also welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” (John 13:18-20)

Another reference to Jesus' prediction about his death!

“He answered, "One of you men who has eaten with me from this dish will betray me. The Son of Man will die, as the Scriptures say. But it's going to be terrible for the one who betrays me! That man would be better off if he had never been born." Judas said, "Teacher, you surely don't mean me!" "That's what you say!" Jesus replied. But later, Judas did betray him.” (Matt. 26:23-25)

“After Judas had gone, Jesus said: Now the Son of Man will be given glory, and he will bring glory to God. Then, after God is given glory because of him, God will bring glory to him, and God will do it very soon.” (John 13:31-32)

The words of Jesus concerning his death appear frequently so that no misunderstanding would take place. At first they did not understand but he not only tells them repeatedly that He will die but he also confirms the prophecies that he will die. His dying was an important feature of his coming to earth.

Establishing the New Covenant, the last Supper.

“During the meal Jesus took some bread in his hands. He blessed the bread and broke it. Then he gave it to his disciples and said, "Take this and eat it. This is my body. Jesus picked up a cup of wine and gave thanks to God. He then gave it to his disciples and said, "Take this and drink it. This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you. It will be poured out, so that many people will have their sins forgiven. From now on I am not going to drink any wine, until I drink new wine with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matt. 26:26-29)

The Last Supper was given to us by Jesus while he was here. Since that time it has been observed in the first generation of Christians remembering his death. Through the centuries the Last Supper has been a continual reminder of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

“Jesus said to his disciples, "Don't be worried! Have faith in God and have faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you. After I have done this, I will come back and take you with me. Then we will be together.” (John 14:1-3)

Only the Son of God could make and fulfill a promise of this magnitude.

Exclusive claims about getting to Heaven.

“Thomas said, "Lord, we don't even know where you are going! How can we know the way?" "I am the way, the truth, and the life!" Jesus answered. "Without me, no one can go to the Father. If you had known me, you would have known the Father. But from now on, you do know him, and you have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need." Jesus replied: Philip, I have been with you for a long time. Don't you know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. How can you ask me to show you the Father?

Don't you believe that I am one with the Father and that the Father is one with me? What I say isn't said on my own. The Father who lives in me does these things.” (John 14:5-10)

The words of Jesus are still true and we cannot change them. Nor would we want to since we have found in them the way to the Father, the truth about God, and the promise of everlasting life in His presence. They are very exclusive words. No other way exists to get into the presence of God. At the same time that Jesus declares that he is The Way, He affirms the knowledge they have of Him being at one with the Father.

“Don't you believe that I am one with the Father and that the Father is one with me? What I say isn't said on my own. The Father who lives in me does these things.” (John 14:11)

While the Trinity is a mystery because of finite human understanding, we have the statement that the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father. We cannot divide up the Trinity for our understanding, but we can believe it because of His works that He did.

Some people including Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses like to argue mathematically about the Trinity. As an example, they say, $1+1+1=3$. Therefore Christians are accused of tri-theism. However, you can do math differently, $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$. In this sense the unity of God is stressed as well as the tri-personal relations in the Trinity. However, attempting to reduce God to a numeral explanation is so demeaning to God in his self-revelation. Reducing the Infinite God to a math formula is like trying to put the ocean in a coke bottle.

“Jesus said to his disciples: If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don't see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with

you and will keep on living in you. I won't leave you like orphans. I will come back to you. In a little while the people of this world won't be able to see me, but you will see me. And because I live, you will live." (John 14: 15-19)

Muslims like to claim that this reference of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is Mohammed. Such a claim absolutely ignores the details of the passages. The word of promise was to the disciples immediately. Mohammed would have meant nothing to them. This Comforter would be with them forever, not waiting 500 years until Mohammed was born.

The Comforter would be with them forever; Mohammed is dead. The world could not see the Comforter, but the citizens of Mecca and Medina saw Mohammed. The Comforter abides in the believers, Mohammed was just a person who claimed to be a warner. Even if one claimed that Mohammed's teaching abided in a person, that is not the same as the Holy Spirit abiding in believers. John the Baptist talked about Jesus as one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

"Then you will know that I am one with the Father. You will know that you are one with me, and I am one with you. If you love me, you will do what I have said, and my Father will love you. I will also love you and show you what I am like." (John 14:20-21)

That day probably refers to Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon all the believers. Now an additional relationship is advanced. Not only is there the union of the Father with the Son, but there is the union of the Holy Spirit with the believer. Before Pentecost the Spirit moved upon the prophets, but now the Spirit indwells all who love Christ.

"Jesus replied: If anyone loves me, they will obey me. Then my Father will love them, and we will come to them and live in them. But anyone who doesn't love me, won't obey me. What they have heard me say doesn't really come from me, but from the Father who sent me. I have told you these things while I am still with you. But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you. I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid." (John 14:23-27)

This is another passage used by Muslims to claim a reference in the New Testament to Mohammed. The details of the passage refute such a claim. Do you love Jesus? Do you keep his word? Only then "we will come to him and make our abode with him." The Comforter, the Holy Spirit shall teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I have said." What is there in the teaching of the Qur'an that talks about the words of Jesus? Mohammed rejected the words of Jesus, he rejected his claim to be the Son of God, he rejected his claim to dying for mankind, and his resurrection from death. Moreover, he rejected the Holy Spirit.

"Jesus said to his disciples: **I am the true vine**, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already clean because of what I have said to you. Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire." (John 15:1-6)

We have here in this passage deep references to the possibility of relationships. Being in union with Christ is possible in a way that is not possible in any other religion. Christ is living and we have a relationship with him. The gift of the Holy Spirit as the down payment of our redemption is part of the promise.

"Now I tell you to love each other, as I have loved you. The greatest way to show love for friends is to die for them. And you are my friends, if you obey me. Servants don't know what their master is doing, and so I don't

“I speak to you as my servants. I speak to you as my friends, and I have told you everything that my Father has told me.” (John 15:12-15)

Jesus gave his life for us. There is no greater gift!

“Everyone who hates me also hates my Father. I have done things that no one else has ever done. If they had not seen me do these things, they would not be guilty. But they did see me do these things, and they still hate me and my Father too. That is why the Scriptures are true when they say, “People hated me for no reason.” **I will send you the Spirit who comes from the Father** and shows what is true. The Spirit will help you and will tell you about me.” (John 15:23-26)

The immediate reference to the Comforter is to the disciples, not somebody 500 years later. Mohammed certainly did not proceed from the Father, the Creator, nor did Jesus send him. The Spirit bears witness to the words of Jesus and confirms them in our hearts.

“I am telling you this to keep you from being afraid. You will be chased out of the Jewish meeting places. And the time will come when people will kill you and think they are doing God a favor. They will do these things because they don't know either the Father or me.” (John 16:1-3)

This is a commentary on all evil deeds done in the name of God. But his judgment is that they do not know the Father nor Jesus Himself. Whatever the case, jihad, hate crimes, terrorism, they do not come from the Father nor Jesus.

“But I tell you that I am going to do what is best for you. That is why I am going away. The Holy Spirit cannot come to help you until I leave. But after I am gone, I will send the Spirit to you. The Spirit will come and show the people of this world the truth about sin and God's justice and the judgment. **The Spirit will show them that they are wrong about sin, because they didn't have faith in me.** They are wrong about God's justice, because I am going to the Father, and you won't see me again. And they are wrong about the judgment, because God has already judged the ruler of this world. I have much more to say to you, but right now it would be more than you could understand. The Spirit shows what is true and will come and guide you into the full truth. The Spirit doesn't speak on his own. He will tell you only what he has heard from me, and he will let you know what is going to happen. The Spirit will bring glory to me by taking my message and telling it to you.” (John 16:7-14)

The Comforter, or helper, came at Pentecost. The disciples were empowered to preach the good news of the resurrection, the forgiveness of sins, and they did many miracles made possible by the Spirit. Their goal was to serve Christ and declare the good news concerning Him.

“Everything that the Father has is mine. That is why I have said that the Spirit takes my message and tells it to you. Jesus told his disciples, “For a little while you won't see me, but after a while you will see me.” (John 16:15-16)

Jesus claimed equality with the Father in that there is an interchange between His power, authority, and the Father. A little while probably refers to the three days of his being in the grave, and then the resurrection.

“I tell you for certain that you will cry and be sad, but the world will be happy. You will be sad, but later you will be happy. When a woman is about to give birth, she is in great pain. But after it is all over, she forgets the pain and is happy, because she has brought a child into the world. You are now very sad. But later I will see you, and you will be so happy that no one will be able to change the way you feel.” (John 16:20-22)

Words of preparation to the disciples about his coming crucifixion. Sadness is followed by the awesome joy of the resurrection. The conviction that Jesus was alive rejoiced the hearts of the disciples and turned them from being afraid into bold messengers of the Good News.

“When that time comes, you won't have to ask me about anything. I tell you for certain that the Father will give you whatever you ask for in my name. You have not asked for

anything in this way before, but now you must ask in my name. Then it will be given to you, so that you will be completely happy. I have used examples to explain to you what I have been talking about. But the time will come when I will speak to you plainly about the Father and will no longer use examples like these. You will ask the Father in my name, and I won't have to ask him for you. **God the Father loves you because you love me, and you believe that I have come from him. I came from the Father into the world, but I am leaving the world and returning to the Father.**" (John 16:23-28)

The sense of union expressed in these words is profound and deep. One may have some sense of analogy when someone has done a good deed to my son I have a sense of appreciation for that person. Here we have the Father loving us because we love the Son.

"The time will come and is already here when all of you will be scattered. Each of you will go back home and leave me by myself. But the Father will be with me, and I won't be alone. I have told you this, so that you might have peace in your hearts because of me. While you are in the world, you will have to suffer. But cheer up! I have defeated the world." (John 16:32-33)

Because the Father is with Him He endured the cross alone. The disciples had fled and He endured the suffering, the humiliation, the scourging alone. But in the process He has overcome the world. His kingdom will be forever.

"One of Jesus' followers pulled out a sword. He struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. But Jesus told him, "Put your sword away. Anyone who lives by fighting will die by fighting. Don't you know that I could ask my Father, and right away he would send me more than twelve armies of angels? But then, how could the words of the Scriptures come true, which say that this must happen?" (Matt. 26:51-54)

There have been many things done in the name of Christ, but there is no command of Christ to use the sword for coercing people into belief. The Crusades have no basis in the words of Jesus. Moreover, the concept of Jihad, convert, submit, or die, is absolutely alien to the teachings of Jesus.

Events leading to the Crucifixion and resurrection.

It was no surprise to Jesus that he would be crucified. The Scriptures prophesied it centuries before. The details of Isaiah 53 show the terrible event.

"But Jesus did not answer. So the high priest said, "With the living God looking on, you must tell the truth. Tell us, are you the Messiah, the Son of God?" "That is what you say!" Jesus answered. **"But I tell all of you, 'Soon you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right side of God All-Powerful** and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" The high priest then tore his robe and said, "This man claims to be God! We don't need any more witnesses! You have heard what he said. What do you think?" They answered, "He is guilty and deserves to die!" (Matt. 26:53-66)

If Jesus was not who He claimed to be, this would be a stupid thing to do. Simply deny any claims to being the Son of God and go free. Jesus could not do that because it was a contradiction to his very Being.

"Pilate then went back inside. He called Jesus over and asked, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Are you asking this on your own or did someone tell you about me?" "You know I'm not a Jew!" Pilate said. "Your own people and the chief priests brought you to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom doesn't belong to this world. If it did, my followers would have fought to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. No, my kingdom doesn't belong to this world." "So you are a king," Pilate replied. "You are saying that I am a king," Jesus told him. "I was born into this world to tell about the truth. And everyone who belongs to the truth knows my voice." (John 18:33-37)

Jesus fulfills the promises to King David that a descendent of David would sit on his throne forever. Only an eternal Being could do this.

"When the chief priests and the temple police saw him, they yelled, "Nail him to a cross! Nail him to a cross!" Pilate told them, "You take him and nail him to a cross! I don't find him guilty of anything." The crowd replied, "He claimed to be the Son of God! Our Jewish Law says that he must be put to death." When Pilate heard this, he was terrified." (John 19:6-8)

The enemies of Jesus knew the claims that He made. They knew the threat of his position. His miracles were known. There was a fickleness of the crowd that it could welcome him into Jerusalem one week and crucify him the following week.

"Two criminals were led out to be put to death with Jesus. When the soldiers came to the place called "The Skull," they nailed Jesus to a cross. They also nailed the two criminals to crosses, one on each side of Jesus. Jesus said, "Father, forgive these people! They don't know what they're doing." (Luke 23:32-34)

"But the other criminal told the first one off, "Don't you fear God? Aren't you getting the same punishment as this man? We got what was coming to us, but he didn't do anything wrong." Then he said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into power!" Jesus replied, "I promise that today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:40-43)

Only the Son of God could make a promise like this. Only the Son of God would pray for their forgiveness in that crucial situation. Through his own death Jesus brought the repentant thief to life everlasting.

The Resurrection story gives further evidence of the crucifixion and death of Jesus.

"The women went into the tomb, and on the right side they saw a young man in a white robe sitting there. They were alarmed. The man said, "Don't be alarmed! **You are looking for Jesus from Nazareth, who was nailed to a cross.** God has raised him to life, and he isn't here. You can see the place where they put his body. Now go and tell his disciples, and especially Peter, that he will go ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, just as he told you." (Mark 16:5-7)

The angels knew who had been crucified, and it was not some stranger, or duplicitous event. Moreover, the resurrection took place and Jesus appeared to them in Galilee. There are a number of appearances of Jesus over a period of 40 days and He was seen by up to 500 people at one time as well as appearing to the eleven disciples, to the women, to the two on the road to Emmaus.

"Then Jesus asked the two disciples, "Why can't you understand? How can you be so slow to believe all that the prophets said? **Didn't you know that the Messiah would have to suffer before he was given his glory?**" Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, beginning with the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets." (Luke 24:25-27)

Even after the resurrection some were slow to believe. Jesus affirms again the prophetic word that the Messiah would suffer all those things before entering into glory.

"While Jesus' disciples were talking about what had happened, Jesus appeared and greeted them. They were frightened and terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus said, "Why are you so frightened? Why do you doubt? Look at my hands and my feet and see who I am! Touch me and find out for yourselves. Ghosts don't have flesh and bones as you see I have." After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. The disciples were so glad and amazed that they could not believe it. Jesus then asked them, "Do you have something to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish. He took it and ate it as they watched." (Luke 24:36-43)

How would you react if you saw a person you believed to be dead? They reacted accordingly. But ghosts don't have hands and feet to feel, and do not request food to eat. He gave them evidence of his realness by their touch and by the food.

"Jesus said to them, "While I was still with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms had to happen." Then he helped them understand the

Scriptures. He told them: The Scriptures say that the Messiah must suffer, then three days later he will rise from death. They also say that all people of every nation must be told in my name to turn to God, in order to be forgiven. So beginning in Jerusalem, you must tell everything that has happened. I will send you the one my Father has promised, but you must stay in the city until you are given power from heaven.” (Luke 24:44-49)

This is the closing of the gospel of Luke and it is very similar to Matthew in that the commission is given to the disciples to preach the gospel of the resurrection and forgiveness.

It is good news about being a new creature in Christ, about living in union with Him.

“So they told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But Thomas said, "First, I must see the nail scars in his hands and touch them with my finger. I must put my hand where the spear went into his side. I won't believe unless I do this!" A week later the disciples were together again. This time, Thomas was with them. Jesus came in while the doors were still locked and stood in the middle of the group. He greeted his disciples and said to Thomas, **"Put your finger here and look at my hands! Put your hand into my side. Stop doubting and have faith!"** Thomas replied, **"You are my Lord and my God!"** Jesus said, "Thomas, do you have faith because you have seen me? The people who have faith in me without seeing me are the ones who are really blessed!" Jesus worked many other miracles for his disciples, and not all of them are written in this book. But these are written so that you will put your faith in Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God. If you have faith in him, you will have true life.” (John 20:25-31)

Thomas will always be remembered as the skeptic and will be appreciated for it. His experience of wanting evidence was honored. In response, he confessed Jesus as Lord and God.

That is the basic theme of the Gospel that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, or God in the flesh.

We have quoted the words of Jesus, the disciples, the angels, his enemies, and they

all affirm the same message, Jesus is Lord. We can close with the words of the prologue to the Gospel of John:

“In the beginning was the one who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God. From the very beginning the Word was with God...” "The Word became a human being and lived here with us. We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us..." "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is truly God and is closest to the Father, has shown us what God is like.” (John 1:1-2; 1:14; 1:18)

The evidence of the Gospels alone tell the story of a person who was more than a prophet.

The miracles in his ministry could not be done by human suggestion. It is only by adopting a purely philosophic naturalism that one can claim that miracles did not happen. Naturalism will not allow even God to exist. People influenced by naturalism may want to believe in God, but not the miracles of Jesus. In so doing, they are denying the basic fabric of the Gospels.

Such a view locks God out of the Creation. Such a view logically rejects the Creation story as well as the Big Bang theory of physics. Atheists have a difficult time since the acceptance of the Big Bang theory of the universe since it requires a point in which the universe began. It is not eternal as atheists used to believe. So how did it come to be? Nothing produces nothing...! It is reasonable to think of an eternal Creator who brought the marvelous universe into existence. Miracles are only possible if God exists. Jesus could do miracles because He was God in the flesh. From the beginning the early Christians believed in the deity of Christ. This was expressed also in the letters of the New Testament as well as the early church fathers who quoted the Gospels and epistles. See www.biblequery.org under Early Christian Doctrines for what the early Christians believed.

The Muslim propaganda that the Scriptures have been corrupted arose later than the Qur'an. We have Greek manuscripts dating long before the time of the Qur'an and they give evidence that the early Christians DID NOT

corrupt the text. One can well raise the question that if God did not keep the Old Testament and the New Testament from corruption what assurance is there that the Quran has not been corrupted.

Continue with [Part II](#).

Endnotes

[1] All Scripture quotations are taken from the Contemporary English Version. Throughout this article, bold emphasis in Scripture quotations is editorial in nature and not part of the original text.

Appendix: Miracles of Jesus

Water made into wine. John 2:1-11
Heals the nobleman's son, John 4:46-54
Draught of fishes, Luke 5:1-11
Heals the Demoniac, Mark 1:23-26, Luke 4:33-36
Heals Peter's Mother-in-law, Matt. 8:14, Mar 1:29, Luke 4:38
Cleanses the leper, Matt. 8:1-4, Mar. 1:40, Luke 5:12
Heals the Paralytic, Mt. 9:1-8, Mar 2:1-12; luke 5:17-26
Restores the centurion's servant, Mt.8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10
Raises the widow's son to life, Luke 7:11-16
Heals a demoniac, Mt. 12:22-37, Mar. 3:11, Luke 11:14-15
Stills the tempest, Mt. 8:23-27; Mar. 4:35, Luke 8:22
Casts devils out of two men of Gadara, Mt. 8:28, Luke 8:26
Raises from the dead the daughter of Jairus, Mt. 9:18-26, Mar. 5:22-24,35-43; Luke 8:41-42, 49-56.
Cures the woman with the issues of blood. Mt. 9:20, Mark 5:25, Luke 8:43
Restores two blind men to sight. Mt. 9:27-31
Heals a demoniac, Mt. 9:32-33
Feeds five thousand people, Mt. 14:15-21; Mar 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-14
Walks on the sea, Mt. 14:22-33; Mar 6:45-52; John 6:16
Heals the daughter of the Syrophenician woman, Mt. 15:21-28, Mar 7:24
Feeds four thousand people. Mt. 15:32; Mark 8:1-9
Restores one deaf and dumb.. Mar 7:31-37
Restores a blind man, Mark 8:22
Restores a lunatic child, Matt. 17:14; Mark 9:14; Luke 9:27
Tribute money obtained from a fish's mouth. Mt. 17:24-27
Restores ten lepers, Luke 17:11-19
Opens the eyes of a man born blind, John 9
Raises Lazarus from the dead, John 11:1-46
Heals the woman with the spirit of infirmity, Luke 13:10-17
Cures a man with dropsy Luke 14:1-6
Restores two blind men near Jericho, Mt. 20:29-34; Mar 10:46-52, Luke 18:35-43
Curses a fig tree, Mt. 21:17-22; Mar.11:12-14; Markk 11:20-24
Heals the ear of Malchus, Luke 22:49-51
Second draught of fishes, John 21:6

The greatest of miracles is his resurrection from the dead. He foretold his death and his resurrection. Easter is the remembrance of this great event.

In the [previous article](#) only the gospels were considered in answering this question. We now turn to the rest of the New Testament, beginning with Acts of the Apostles, the companion book to the Gospel of Luke and written by the same writer. Acts catalogs the beginning of the Christian movement following the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The date of the book of Acts would be between 57-62.

Acts 1:1-5 "Theophilus, I first wrote to you about all that Jesus did and taught from the very first until he was taken up to heaven. But before he was taken up, he gave orders to the apostles he had chosen with the help of the Holy Spirit. **For forty days after Jesus had suffered and died**, he proved in many ways that he had been raised from death. He appeared to his apostles and spoke to them about God's kingdom. While he was still with them, he said: Don't leave Jerusalem yet. **Wait here for the Father to give you the Holy Spirit**, just as I told you he has promised to do. John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

The first history book about the apostles mentions in these first verses the fact that Jesus suffered and died, was resurrected and seen by his disciples over a period of 40 days to prove to them in many ways that he was risen from the dead, gave them instruction about waiting in Jerusalem, about God's kingdom, and waiting for the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit. Then he was taken up into heaven.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is important. When Jesus lived a human life in the country of Israel, he was limited by his physical presence. He could not be in many places at the same time. God's plan to be involved in the lives of his followers is made possible by the gift of His Spirit. The Spirit of God is not localized to one geographic center nor to one time as Jesus was. The Spirit of God is able to indwell the lives of all who have committed their lives to Jesus.

He is with us forever.

All of these ideas are important for Muslims to consider. Mohammed taught that the Crucifixion did not take place. The historical documents affirm that it did.

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die but the early documents affirm that he did die and was raised to life in three days. Muslim believe that the Holy Spirit refers to Mohammed but this makes no sense for the disciples were to receive the Holy Spirit in a little while, not 600 years later.

Acts 1:8-9 "But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world." After Jesus had said this and while they were watching, he was taken up into a cloud." They could not see him..."

There are many competing religions in the world, but we are primarily concerned with the Christian Faith and Islam. The threat of Islam is the sword and the loss of freedom of choice. The early apostles were given the power of the Holy Spirit, not the sword, and they were commissioned to go everywhere beginning in Jerusalem and tell about Jesus. That is the transforming power of the Christian faith—the story of Jesus. It is the story of God's love for the world in sending His Son to die for us, to bring forgiveness, to bring hope of new life now in Christ, and hope of the future in the presence of God forever. It is the story about freedom for mankind from sin's consequences, from guilt, from slavery to sin. It is a story of equality of men and women, a story that brings dignity to women as well as men.

In contrast, Islam, by means of the sword, has brought captivity to many civilizations, it has brought suffering to women, slavery to many, mutilation to women's sex organs, honor killings of young girls and women, and harsh inequality between men and women.

Acts 1:14 "The apostles often met together and prayed with a single purpose in mind. The **women and Mary the mother of Jesus would meet with them**, and so would his brothers."

Not only were women followers of Jesus in support of his ministry in the Gospels, but here we have the women and Jesus' mother, Mary, meeting together, not separately as in Islam, for the purpose of prayer. The equality of men and women can be seen in the very beginning of the Christian church. This is the last mention of Mary in the New Testament. The disciples were praying with her, not to her.

Acts 1:16 "He said: My friends, long ago by the power of the **Holy Spirit**, David said something about Judas, and what he said has now happened."

Peter's speech affirms what Christians have believed concerning the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit inspired King David in his comments about Judas. The Holy Spirit as a person of the Trinity, co-equal, co-eternal with the Father and the Son did not begin in the Christian era.

Acts 1:21 "So we need someone else to help us tell others that Jesus has been raised from death. He must also be one of the men who was with us from the very beginning. He must have been with us from the time the Lord Jesus was baptized by John until the day he was taken to heaven."

The Gospel about Jesus' death and resurrection stands on historical witness. The person's credibility was based on the long term association with Jesus from the time he began his public ministry to the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven by Jesus. History is important in terms of the Bible. It records God's acts in history. Luke began his gospel account confirming all the investigation he had made concerning the events of the life of Jesus.

Acts 2:1-4 "On the day of Pentecost all the Lord's followers were together in one place. Suddenly there was a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind! It filled the house where they were meeting. Then they saw what looked like fiery tongues moving in all directions, and a tongue came and settled on each person there. The **Holy Spirit took control of everyone**, and they began speaking whatever languages the Spirit let them speak."

Jesus said this would happen. The Holy Spirit gave them the power to speak various languages. That is remarkable in itself. But more remarkable is the fulfillment of the words of Jesus that God's Spirit would take up residence in the life of the believer. This fulfills the words of Jesus that the Spirit will be in you and remain in you. The believer has the companionship of the Spirit as his helper. There is an intimacy here that is missing in Islam. Allah wants obedience. He does not offer companionship, or intimacy, or a change of the heart.

Acts 2:16-21 "But this is what God had the prophet Joel say, "When the last days come, I will give my **Spirit to everyone**. Your sons and **daughters** will prophesy. Your young men will see visions, and your old men will have dreams. In those days I will give my Spirit to my servants, both men and women, and they will prophesy. I will work miracles in the sky above and wonders on the earth below. There will be blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be as red as blood before the great and wonderful day of the Lord appears. Then the Lord will save everyone who asks for his help."

The events of Pentecost were foretold by the prophet Joel. The gift of His Spirit, the gift of prophecy, the working of miracles, and the saving of people who seek God are all involved in the prophecy. All these events took place in the early church.

Equally important results relate to the role of the daughters, the women, who are given the Spirit because of their faith in Jesus, and their equal status. Muslim men and women need to look at the status of women as second class persons and consider what Jesus has done for them to bring them to equality with the men.

Acts 2:22-24 "Now, listen to what I have to say about Jesus from Nazareth. God proved that he sent Jesus to you by having him work miracles, wonders, and signs. All of you know this. God had already planned and decided that Jesus would be handed over to you. So you took him and had evil men put him to **death on a cross**. But God set him free from death and raised him to life. Death could not hold him in its power."

Peter's speech to the crowd of people affirmed the events of the Gospel that Jesus died and was raised to life again after 3 days. They had the knowledge of what Jesus did in terms of miracles, signs, and wonders. More striking is the statement that God had planned this. There are some Muslim scholars who believe that prophets were not subjected to such persecutions. The record of the Old Testament is that many prophets suffered persecution and death. The most important death is that of Jesus and death could not hold him in its power.

Jesus said, because I live you shall live also.

Acts 2:31-33 "David knew this would happen, and so he told us that Christ would be raised to life. He said that God would not leave him in the grave or let his body decay. All of us can tell you that God has raised Jesus to life! Jesus was taken up to sit at the right side of God, and he was given the **Holy Spirit, just as the Father had promised**. Jesus is also the one who has given the Spirit to us, and that is what you are now seeing and hearing."

David was a prophet, (also affirmed to be a prophet by Muslims,) and foretold that Christ would be raised to life. Peter declares that all of the witnesses "can tell you that God raised Jesus to life." He is now at the right side of God. The Holy Spirit has been given as the Father promised.

Acts 2:36-37 "Everyone in Israel should then know for certain that **God has made Jesus both Lord** and Christ, even though *you put him to death on a cross*. When the people heard this, they were very upset. They asked Peter and the other apostles, "Friends, what shall we do?"

Jesus is both Lord and Christ, or Messiah. The realization that they had put him to death now comes crashing down on them with guilt and alarm, and their question, "what shall we do?" leads to Peter's answer.

Acts 2:38-39 "Peter said, "Turn back to God! Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins will be forgiven. Then you will be given **the Holy Spirit**. This promise is for you and your children. It is for everyone our Lord God will choose, no matter where they live."

How does one become a Christian? It begins with repentance from sin and turning to God, confessing your faith in Jesus by being baptized in his name. As a result your sins are forgiven, and you are given the promised Holy Spirit. The trinity is again affirmed here. God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is not something that took centuries to develop. It is affirmed from the beginning of the Christian movement.

Acts 3:1-6 "The time of prayer was about three o'clock in the afternoon, and Peter and John were going into the temple. A man who had been born lame was being carried to the temple door. Each day he was placed beside this door, known as the Beautiful Gate. He sat there and begged from the people who were going in. The man saw Peter and John entering the temple, and he asked them for money. But they looked straight at him and said, "Look up at us!" The man stared at them and thought he was going to get something. But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold! But I will give you what I do have. **In the name of Jesus Christ** from Nazareth, get up and start walking."

There are a number of miracles recorded in Acts. This is the first one by the apostles. How did they do them? By the power of Jesus Christ. In contrast, the name of Mohammed is not associated with miracles. The Muslim claim that the Qur'an is a miracle is false. There is nothing miraculous about the Qur'an. Mohammed's challenge to create a sura like it has been done many times but Islam believes that only the Qur'an is a miracle and hence cannot admit that any other verse can be as good or better by virtue of their definition. Mohammed said no one could do it and because he said it nothing can be accepted against his statement. This is the acceptance of a view that allows no competition.

Acts 3:12-15 "Peter saw that a crowd had gathered, and he said: Friends, why are you surprised at what has happened? Why are you staring at us? Do you think we have some power of our own? Do you think we were able to make this man walk because we are so religious?"

The God that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and our other ancestors worshiped has brought honor to his Servant Jesus. He is the one you betrayed. You turned against him when he was being tried by Pilate, even though Pilate wanted to set him free. You rejected Jesus, who was holy and good. You asked for a murderer to be set free, and **you killed the one who leads people to life**. But God raised him from death, and all of us can tell you what he has done."

If the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus had not taken place as Mohammed taught, why would the eye witnesses to Jesus' life and death stress this point so much? The charge was serious, "you killed the one who leads people life, but God raised him from death."

How wrong Mohammed was can be seen in the words of Peter that Jesus is the one who leads people to life. If you want to have life, everlasting life, you have to forsake Mohammed and give your life to Jesus. It is that simple. It is that urgent. How bitter will be the feeling to know that one has rejected the one who gives Life to people.

Acts 3:18-23 "**But God had his prophets tell that his Messiah would suffer**, and now he has kept that promise. So turn to God! Give up your sins, and you will be forgiven. Then that time will come when the Lord will give you fresh strength. He will send you Jesus, his chosen Messiah. But Jesus must stay in heaven until God makes all things new, just as his holy prophets promised long ago. Moses said, "The Lord your God will choose one of your own people to be a prophet, just as he chose me. Listen to everything he tells you. **No one who disobeys that prophet will be one of God's people any longer.**"

The Muslim claim that Jesus was not crucified and resurrected is contrary to history. The substitution of somebody else on the cross is deception and contrary to the Old Testament prophets. The Messiah would suffer.

This is seen in a number of prophecies of the Old Testament and best described by Isaiah 53. Not only would the Messiah suffer, but he will also return "until God makes all things new" as the prophets indicated. The words of Peter reject the claims of Muslims that the "prophet" mentioned by Moses refers to Mohammed. To reject the words of Jesus excludes people from being a part of God's people.

Peter again stresses the role of Jesus, the chosen Messiah. Turning to Him is the answer to sin and forgiveness.

Acts 4:1-2 "The apostles were still talking to the people, when some priests, the captain of the temple guard, and some Sadducees arrived. These men were angry because the apostles were teaching the people that the dead would be raised from death, **just as Jesus had been raised from death.**"

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body, and in Jesus' resurrection particularly. However, the message of the apostles is that Jesus did die on the cross and was raised from death. The death and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation message of the Gospel. It is the story of something that happened and was seen by eye witnesses. No amount of denial by Muslims can do away with the truth. But ignoring the truth excludes one from being a part of God's people. Don't do it!

Acts 4:4 "But a lot of people who had heard the message believed it. So by now there were about five thousand **followers of the Lord.**"

The affirmation that Jesus is Lord began early. It is part of the Gospel record as well as the early Church's belief. It is affirmed in the letters we shall examine in the following pages.

Acts 4:7-13 "They brought in Peter and John and made them stand in the middle while they questioned them. They asked, "By what power and in whose name have you done this?" Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and told the nation's leaders and the elders: You are questioning us today about a kind deed in which a crippled man was healed. But there is something we must tell you and everyone else in Israel. This man is standing here completely well because of the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth. You put Jesus to death on a cross, but God raised him to life. He is the stone that you builders thought was worthless, and now he is the most important stone of all. **Only Jesus has the power to save! His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone.** The officials were amazed to see how brave Peter and John were, and they knew that these two apostles were only ordinary men and not well educated. The officials were certain that these men had been with Jesus."

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter told them that the man was healed by the power of Jesus Christ. You put Jesus to death on a cross, but God raised him to life. Very sincerely Peter told them that "His name is the only one in all the world that can save anyone."

Dear Muslim, let these words soak into your mind, heart, and emotions. There is a choice to be made between Jesus and Mohammed. Mohammed can offer you no hope. Jesus is the source of Life. If these words are true, and I believe they are, following Mohammed is a dead end, going away from heaven, not toward it.

The officials were amazed but knew that the apostles had been with Jesus. If you give your heart to Jesus you will know his power to change you. Mohammed does not have power to change your inner being.

The two men were told to be quiet about Jesus and they replied,

Acts 4:19-20 "Peter and John answered, "Do you think God wants us to obey you or to obey him? We cannot keep quiet about what we have seen and heard."

The eye witness quality of the early record is stressed. Your faith in Jesus is built upon the solid foundation of witnesses.

Acts 4:23-31 "As soon as Peter and John had been set free, they went back and told the others everything that the chief priests and the leaders had said to them. When the rest of the Lord's followers heard this, they prayed together and said: Master, you created heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. And by the **Holy Spirit** you spoke to our ancestor David. He was your servant, and you told him to say: "Why are all the Gentiles so furious? Why do people make foolish plans? The kings of earth prepare for war, and the rulers join together against the Lord and his Messiah." Here in Jerusalem, Herod and Pontius Pilate got together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel. Then they turned against your holy Servant Jesus, your chosen Messiah. They

did what you in your power and wisdom had already decided would happen. Lord, listen to their threats! We are your servants. So make us brave enough to speak your message. Show your mighty power, as we heal people and work miracles and wonders in the name of your holy Servant Jesus. After they had prayed, the meeting place shook. They were all filled with the **Holy Spirit** and bravely spoke God's message."

The presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives was the transforming source of the beginning of the church. In this prayer the Holy Spirit is again related to David as a prophet. People made plans against the Lord and His Messiah in Jerusalem under Herod and Pilate. God had already decided that the Messiah would die. Their prayer was that God would do miracles and show people that Jesus was risen. Their prayer is answered by the "filling of the Holy Spirit" and they declared God's message about the Messiah.

The closeness of the believers brought them to share their means with others. However, the story of Ananias and his wife tells a tragic story of selfishness.

Acts 5:1-5 "Ananias and his wife Sapphira also sold a piece of property. But they agreed to cheat and keep some of the money for themselves. So when Ananias took the rest of the money to the apostles, Peter said, "Why has Satan made you keep back some of the money from the sale of the property? Why have you **lied to the Holy Spirit**? The property was yours before you sold it, and even after you sold it, the money was still yours. What made you do such a thing? You didn't lie to people. You lied to God!" As soon as Ananias heard this, he dropped dead, and everyone who heard about it was frightened."

Lying to the **Holy Spirit** was a grave sin. It is lying to God. This is another affirmation of the unity of the persons of the Trinity.

Acts 5:9 "Then Peter said, "Why did the two of you agree to test the Lord's Spirit? The men who buried Ananias are by the door, and they will carry you out!"

Sapphira conspired with her husband and her sin was the same and the punishment also.

Acts 5:12 "The apostles worked many miracles and wonders among the people. All of the Lord's followers often met in the part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch. No one outside their group dared join them, even though everyone liked them very much. Many men and women started **having faith in the Lord**."

The followers of Jesus, the Lord's followers grew in number and many started having faith in the Lord. Faith in the Lord means to commit oneself to Jesus. I must ask Jesus to come into my life as Lord of my life. This is the most important commitment one can make in life. Many wonderful things happen when one makes a commitment. A marriage involves commitment to another, children involve a commitment to being a parent of them, and simple business matters involve a commitment to buy a house, a business, etc. The commitment of your life to Jesus is **the** most important commitment you will ever make.

Acts 5:28-32 "We told you plainly not to teach in the name of Jesus. But look what you have done! You have been teaching all over Jerusalem, and you are trying to blame us for his death." Peter and the apostles replied: We don't obey people. We obey God. **You killed Jesus by nailing him to a cross**. But the God our ancestors worshiped raised him to life and made him our Leader and Savior. Then God gave him a place at his right side, so that the people of Israel would turn back to him and be forgiven. We are here to tell you about all this, and so is **the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to everyone who obeys God**."

The high priest and Sadducees were livid about the apostles' preaching. "You are trying to blame us for his death." If the crucifixion never happened this would not make any sense. But the apostles were witnesses of it. Nailing Jesus to the cross was their doing. But God raised him to life again. Not only were the apostles telling this message but it was confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

As the church grew it was necessary to appoint some people who would help care for the widows in the group. The apostles could not quit preaching the Gospel to serve tables and so Peter said,

Acts 6:3-4 "My friends, choose seven men who are **respected and wise and filled with God's Spirit**. We will put them in charge of these things. We can spend our time praying and serving God by preaching."

The presence of God's Spirit in their lives was crucial. Seven were chosen and among them was Stephen, also described as filled with the Spirit.

Acts 6:8 "God gave Stephen the power to work great miracles and wonders among the people."

Some men contrived testimony against Stephen and he was stoned to death. Stephen gave a long speech about the history of Israel and the rebellion of the people against God's commands. Then he directed his comments to them:

Acts 7:51-56 "You stubborn and hardheaded people! You are always fighting against **the Holy Spirit**, just as your ancestors did. Is there one prophet that your ancestors didn't mistreat? They killed the prophets who told about the coming of the One Who Obeys God. And now you have turned against him and killed him. Angels gave you God's Law, but you still don't obey it. When the council members heard Stephen's speech, they were angry and furious. **But Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit**. He looked toward heaven, where he saw our glorious God and Jesus standing at his right side. Then Stephen said, **"I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right side of God!"**

They closed their ears to his comments, dragged him out of the city, and stoned him to death.

Acts 7:59-60 "As Stephen was being stoned to death, he called out, "Lord Jesus, please welcome me!" He knelt down and shouted, "Lord, don't blame them for what they have done." Then he died."

Stephen accuses them of killing the prophets who told of the coming Messiah, and now you killed Him. His vision of heaven was that Jesus was at the right side of God and He is the Son of Man standing there. In his death Stephen prayed the same prayer of Jesus, "forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Acts 8:16-17 "Before this, the Holy Spirit had not been given to anyone in Samaria, though some of them had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Peter and John then placed their hands on **everyone who had faith in the Lord, and they were given the Holy Spirit**."

The Holy Spirit is again emphasized along with the name of the Lord Jesus. The title of "Lord" in connection with Jesus details his relations with God the Father. This passage is also important for it accepts a non-Jewish community into the fellowship of the church. The Samaritans were regarded as half-breeds not welcomed into the Jewish community at the time.

Acts 8:27-29 "So Philip left. An important Ethiopian official happened to be going along that road in his chariot. He was the chief treasurer for Candace, the Queen of Ethiopia. The official had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was now on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot, reading the book of the prophet Isaiah. **The Spirit** told Philip to catch up with the chariot."

The book of Acts speaks a number of times of the Spirit's leading, directing, and empowering. If a Muslim will read the gospels as well as the book of Acts and the Epistles it will be obvious that the Spirit cannot in any way be related to Mohammed.

Acts 8:32-35 "The man was reading the passage that said, "He was led like a sheep on its way to be killed. He was silent as a lamb whose wool is being cut off, and he did not say a word. He was treated like a nobody and did not receive a fair trial. How can he have children, if his life is snatched away?" The official said to Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or about someone else?" So Philip began at this place in the Scriptures and explained the good **news about Jesus**."

Again, the prophet Isaiah is the background for the suffering of Jesus. Philip explained the passage and explained the wonderful news of the resurrection. The passage continues to tell how the man believed and was baptized. The Acts account then says, **Act 8:39** "After they had come out of the water, the **Lord's Spirit** took Philip away. The official never saw him again, but he was very happy as he went on his way.

The killing of Stephen brought increased persecution and one of the key persecutors was a man named Saul from Tarsus.

Acts 9:1-2 "Saul kept on threatening to kill the **Lord's** followers. He even went to the high priest and asked for letters to the Jewish leaders in Damascus. He did this because he wanted to arrest and take to Jerusalem any man or woman who had accepted the **Lord's Way**."

Jesus is Lord.

Acts 9:3-5 "When Saul had almost reached Damascus, a bright light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice that said, "Saul! Saul! Why are you so cruel to me?" "Who are you?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus," the Lord answered. "I am the one you are so cruel to."

The Greek manuscript says, "Who are you, Lord?" asks Saul. The answer: "I am Jesus"

In today's terrorist world it is worthy noting that Saul's persecution of the Christians was really the persecution of Jesus. Muslim terrorism of Christians is really terrorism of Jesus.

Acts 9:10-11, "A follower named Ananias lived in Damascus, and the Lord spoke to him in a vision. Ananias answered, "**Lord, here I am.**" The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the house of Judas on Straight Street. When you get there, you will find a man named Saul from the city of Tarsus."

Ananias responded to the "Lord" and obeyed Him.

Saul was given instructions to go into Damascus where a man, Ananias, would come and give him a message which is described: Acts 9:17 "Ananias left and went into the house where Saul was staying. Ananias placed his hands on him and said, "Saul, the **Lord Jesus** has sent me. He is the same one who appeared to you along the road. He wants you to be able to see and to be **filled with the Holy Spirit.**"

Again we encounter the Lord Jesus and the filling of the Holy Spirit which was promised to believers.

Acts 9:20 "Soon he went to the Jewish meeting places and started telling people that Jesus is the **Son of God.**"

Before, he hated Jesus, now after his encounter he is describing Jesus as the Son of God. When one encounters Jesus one encounters God. There are a number of Muslims who have encountered Jesus in dreams and visions. Their conclusion is the same: Jesus is the Son of God. You can check testimonies out at [this site](#).

Acts 9:31 "The church in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria now had a time of peace and kept on worshiping the Lord. The church became stronger, as the Holy Spirit encouraged it and helped it grow."

Saul's preaching grew more powerful and enemies tried to silence him, threatened to kill him. In worshiping the Lord the church grew and the Holy Spirit was behind it. The statements that require the conclusion for the trinity are all over the New Testament. We have here the Lord Jesus and distinct from him is the Holy Spirit.

Many wonderful things were done by the disciples in the name of Jesus. Peter visited the believers at Lydda where there was a very sick man name Aeneas.

Acts 9:34-35 "Peter said to Aeneas, "Jesus Christ has healed you! Get up and make up your bed." Right away he stood up. Many people in the towns of Lydda and Sharon saw Aeneas and became followers of the Lord."

Shortly thereafter in Joppa Peter prayed for a woman who had died and she was raised to life again. Because of this great miracle "Everyone in Joppa heard what had happened, and many of them put their faith in the Lord." Acts 9:42

The next big story relates to the Gentiles who are welcomed into the family of God. Peter is the main character in the incident. While he was yet in Joppa he had a vision given by God.

The vision detailed men coming from Cornelius and they described him as follows.

Acts 10:22 "They answered, "Captain Cornelius sent us. He is a good man who worships God and is liked by the Jewish people. One of God's holy angels told Cornelius to send for you, so he could hear what you have to say."

What is significant about this man? He is a godly man, but he needed something more.

He needed to hear the Gospel and did, and his life was changed.

In obedience to the vision Peter went to Caesarea to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. After the group was assembled Peter spoke.

Acts 10:34-48 "Peter then said: Now I am certain that God treats all people alike. God is pleased with everyone who worships him and does right, no matter what nation they come from. This is the same message that God gave to the people of Israel, **when he sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all**, to offer peace to them. You surely know what happened everywhere in Judea. It all began in Galilee after John had told everyone to be baptized. **God gave the Holy Spirit and power to Jesus from Nazareth.** He was with Jesus, as he went around doing good and healing everyone who was under the power of the devil. We all saw what Jesus did both in Israel

and in the city of Jerusalem. **Jesus was put to death on a cross. But three days later, God raised him to life and let him be seen.** Not everyone saw him. He was seen only by us, who ate and drank with him after he was raised from death. We were the ones God chose to tell others about him. God told us to announce clearly to the people that Jesus is the one he has chosen to judge the living and the dead. Every one of the prophets has said that all who have faith in Jesus will have their sins forgiven in his name. **While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit took control of everyone who was listening.** Some Jewish followers of the Lord had come with Peter, and they were surprised that the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles. Now they were hearing Gentiles speaking unknown languages and praising God. Peter said, "These Gentiles have been given the Holy Spirit, just as we have! I am certain that no one would dare stop us from baptizing them." Peter ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and they asked him to stay on for a few days."

This long section stresses several ideas First, God sent Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, to offer peace to all. Second, God gave the Holy Spirit to Jesus. Third, Jesus was put to death on a cross. Fourth, he was raised to life three days later. Fifth, the disciples are witnesses of those things. Sixth, Jesus is to judge the living and the dead, not someone one else. Seventh, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in unknown languages as at Pentecost. Eighth, because of their faith they were baptized in the name of Jesus.

When the persecutions scattered people to various part of the Middle East, many of the went to the Jews first to declare the gospel, but others went to the Gentiles.

Acts 11:20-21 "Some of the followers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and started telling Gentiles the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's power was with them, and many people turned to the **Lord and put their faith in him.**"

Again it must be emphasized that "the Lord Jesus" is a term used early in the church. It did not evolve as centuries went along.

The news about the new believers reached the apostles at Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to check it out.

Acts 11:23-24 "When Barnabas got there and saw what God had been kind enough to do for them, he was very glad. So he begged them to remain faithful to the Lord with all their hearts. Barnabas was a good man of great faith, and he was **filled with the Holy Spirit.** Many more people turned to the Lord."

The spread of Christianity came by preaching. These were powerless people. They had no weapons of force. Their personalities were filled with the Holy Spirit's power and they declared the events about Jesus, his death and resurrection, and the forgiveness of sins in his name. That was the good news. There was no conquest by military force, no coercion, no intimidation, no threatening of life and limb. Only the good news that God loved them to send his Son to die for them and give them new life.

Acts 12:24 "God's message kept spreading." The word of God is the word of the Gospel. It kept spreading and growing. There is no other message from God except the Gospel about the death and life of Jesus. To reject this message as the Muslims do is to reject what God has said. This is a serious rejection. If you put out the light, there is only darkness.

Already we have seen things that the Holy Spirit was doing. Now we come to a new decision by the Spirit. The Spirit is a person with intelligence, will, and power. This is seen in the following: "While they were worshiping the Lord and going without eating, **the Holy Spirit told them, 'Appoint Barnabas and Saul to do the work for which I have chosen them.'**" Acts 13:2

Acts 13:4 "After Barnabas and Saul had been sent by the **Holy Spirit**, they went to Seleucia. From there they sailed to the island of Cyprus."

In Antioch in Pisidia the message was essentially the same.

Acts 13:26-30 "Now listen, you descendants of Abraham! Pay attention, all of you Gentiles who are here to worship God! Listen to this message about how to be saved, because it is for everyone. The people of Jerusalem and their leaders didn't realize who Jesus was. And they didn't understand the words of the prophets that they read each Sabbath. So they condemned Jesus just as the prophets had said. They did exactly what the Scriptures said they would. Even though they couldn't find any reason to put Jesus to death, they still asked Pilate to have

him killed. **After Jesus had been put to death, he was taken down from the cross and placed in a tomb. But God raised him from death!**

If this message were preached today, it would begin, "Listen, Muslims, to this message about how to be saved because it is for everyone. You have to give up Mohammed's rejection of the crucifixion. The records declare it over and over. There is no forgiveness for you without Jesus as Lord. You may be in ignorance now, but having read this far you now know for sure.

Acts 13:31-38 "Then for many days Jesus appeared to his followers who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. Now they are telling our people about him. God made a promise to our ancestors. And we are here to tell you the good news that he has kept this promise to us. It is just as the **second Psalm says about Jesus**, "You are my son because today I have become your Father." God raised Jesus from death and will never let his body decay. It is just as God said, "I will make to you the same holy promise that I made to David."

And in another psalm it says, "God will never let the body of his Holy One decay."

When David was alive, he obeyed God. Then after he died, he was buried in the family grave, and his body decayed. **But God raised Jesus from death, and his body did not decay.** My friends, the message is that Jesus can forgive your sins! The Law of Moses could not set you free from all your sins.

Many Scriptures of the Old Testament point to the suffering Messiah. Paul appeals to these Scriptures to show that the death and resurrection of Jesus was prophesied.

As Paul and Barnabas left the area "the Lord's followers in Antioch were very happy and were filled with the **Holy Spirit.**" Acts 13:52

God's gift of the Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus in the Gospels and this will be seen to be more experienced in the lives of the believers as we read the letters of the New Testament.

In Iconium (Acts 14:3), "Paul and Barnabas stayed there for a while, having faith in the Lord and bravely speaking his message. The Lord gave them the power to work miracles and wonders, and he showed that their message about his great kindness was true."

In many places in Acts the Lord confirmed his message of the Gospel by miracles and wonders.

Eventually some Jewish converts wanted all Gentiles to be circumcised as Moses commanded. This was contrary to the Gospel's transformation of people. A meeting of the apostles was held in Jerusalem and after...

Acts 15:7-9 "They had talked it over for a long time, when Peter got up and said: My friends, you know that God decided long ago to let me be the one from your group to preach the good news to the Gentiles. God did this so that they would hear and obey him. He knows what is in everyone's heart. And he showed that he had chosen the Gentiles, when **he gave them the Holy Spirit, just as he had given his Spirit to us.** God treated them in the same way that he treated us. They put their faith in him, and he made their hearts pure."

The important conclusion of the meeting in Jerusalem by the apostles was the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers who trusted Jesus. Any objection would have been arguing against God's acceptance of the Gentiles in the Kingdom of God. This can be seen in their comments in the following verse. Acts 15:11 "But our Lord Jesus was kind to us, and we are saved by faith in him, just as the Gentiles are."

Acts 16:6-9 "Paul and his friends went through Phrygia and Galatia, but the **Holy Spirit** would not let them preach in Asia. After they arrived in Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the **Spirit of Jesus** would not let them. So they went on through Mysia until they came to Troas. During the night, Paul had a vision of someone from Macedonia who was standing there and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!"

Again we see here that the Holy Spirit is not a force, but a person who speaks, directs, and empowers. We also have the same idea in the Spirit of Jesus.

In Philippi Paul encountered a girl possessed by a demon. Acts 16:17-18,

"The girl followed Paul and the rest of us and kept yelling, "These men are servants of the Most High God! They are telling you how to be saved." This went on for several days. Finally, Paul got so upset that he turned and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ, I order you to leave this girl alone!" At once the evil spirit left her."

The name of Jesus is powerful. He is the basis of transformation. This event was followed by accusations by the owners of the girl to the legal authorities and they put Paul and Silas in jail. At midnight they were singing and an earthquake shook the jail and the jailer thought they had escaped. The jailer was about to kill himself but Paul cried out, "Don't do it we are all here."

Acts 16:30-34 "After he had led them out of the jail, he asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They replied, **"Have faith in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved!"** This is also true for everyone who lives in your home." Then Paul and Silas told him and everyone else in his house about the Lord. While it was still night, the jailer took them to a place where he could wash their cuts and bruises. Then he and everyone in his home were baptized. They were very glad that they had put their faith in God. After this, the jailer took Paul and Silas to his home and gave them something to eat."

The answer to the question, "what must I do to be saved?" is still the same. Have faith in the Lord Jesus.

Acts 17:1-3 "After Paul and his friends had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they went on to Thessalonica. A Jewish meeting place was in that city. So as usual, Paul went there to worship, and on three Sabbaths he spoke to the people. He used the Scriptures to show them that the **Messiah had to suffer**, but that he **would rise from death**. Paul also told them that Jesus is the Messiah he was preaching about."

Again and again the message of the Gospel is about the death and resurrection of Jesus. This was the message foretold by the prophets and now fulfilled in Jesus. Why would a Muslim reject this message? One could surmise an atheist would reject the resurrection, but not the death of Jesus. The only reason Mohammed could have rejected it was out of ignorance or misunderstanding or being mislead. The prophecies of his suffering were convincing to many in the Jewish audience and they believed. It does not make sense that the record insists that God brought this about and later Allah did not know about it, or declared it to be false.

Paul eventually came to Athens and preached the gospel there. He was brought before the Areopagus to explain the new teaching to the Greeks.

Acts 17:30-32 "In the past, God forgave all this because people did not know what they were doing. But now he says that everyone everywhere must turn to him. He has set a day when he will judge the world's people with fairness. And he has chosen the man Jesus to do the judging for him. God has given proof of this to all of us by **raising Jesus from death**. As soon as the people heard Paul say that a man had been raised from death, some of them started laughing. Others said, "We will hear you talk about this some other time."

There were many gods in ancient Athens. The reason the people laughed about the resurrection was probably because the gods were powerless. God has great power and it is reflected in the resurrection of Jesus from death. It is also reflected in the many miracles the disciples did in the beginning of the Christian era.

Acts 19:1-7 "While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul traveled across the hill country to Ephesus, where he met some of the Lord's followers. **He asked them, "When you put your faith in Jesus, were you given the Holy Spirit?"** "No!" they answered. "We have never even heard of the Holy Spirit." "Then why were you baptized?" Paul asked. They answered, "Because of what John taught." Paul replied, "John baptized people so that they would turn to God. But he also told them that someone else was coming, and that they should put their faith in him. Jesus is the one that John was talking about." After the people heard Paul say this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Paul placed his hands on them. The Holy Spirit was given to them, and they spoke unknown languages and prophesied. There were about twelve men in this group."

This passage shows the incompleteness of the message of John the Baptist. They were lacking in knowledge about the full message of Jesus. They had not received the Holy Spirit in their lives. They did not know the basic information of the gospel, that Jesus had died, was resurrected, and promised the Spirit.

Paul met believers from Ephesus and told them he would not see them again. In his farewell speech to them he told them:

Acts 20:20-23 "When I preached in public or taught in your homes, I didn't hold back from telling anything that would help you. I told Jews and Gentiles to turn to **God** and have faith in our **Lord Jesus**. I don't know what will happen to me in Jerusalem, but I must **obey God's Spirit** and go there. In every city I visit, I am told by the **Holy Spirit** that I will be put in jail and will be in trouble in Jerusalem."

Once again we have the ideas that brought about the doctrine of the Trinity. We have "turning to God" "faith in the Lord Jesus," and "obeying God's Spirit." The person of the Holy Spirit is stressed in the fore-knowledge that Paul would encounter problems in going to Jerusalem.

Acts 20:28-30 "Look after yourselves and everyone the **Holy Spirit** has placed in your care. Be like shepherds to God's church. It is the flock that he bought with the **blood of his own Son**. I know that after I am gone, others will come like fierce wolves to attack you. Some of your own people will tell lies to win over the Lord's followers."

The pastors were charged to care for the believers that the Holy Spirit placed in their care. The next phrase, "the flock that he bought with the blood of his own Son" refers to the crucifixion. This is the real Gospel, that Jesus died for us, his blood was poured out as he said in the Last Supper.

There is the warning against people who will tell lies about the Lord's followers. They were the false teachers and false prophets who began in the early decades of the Christian movement and continued to the present including Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Deedat and others.

Continuing their journey they docked at Tyre where "We looked up the Lord's followers and stayed with them for a week. The Holy Spirit had told them to warn Paul not to go on to Jerusalem." Acts 21:4

Another reference to the Spirit's activity in warning Paul.

In Caesarea the prophet Agabus met Paul and "He took Paul's belt, and with it he tied up his own hands and feet. Then he told us, "**The Holy Spirit says** that some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will tie up the man who owns this belt. They will also hand him over to the Gentiles." Acts 21:11

Acts. 26:14-18 "We all fell to the ground. Then I heard a voice say to me in Aramaic, "Saul, Saul, why are you so cruel to me? It's foolish to fight against me!" "Who are you?" I asked. **Then the Lord answered, "I am Jesus! I am the one you are so cruel to.** Now stand up. I have appeared to you, because I have chosen you to be my servant. You are to tell others what you have learned about me and what I will show you later." The Lord also said, "I will protect you from the Jews and from the Gentiles that I am sending you to. I want you to open their eyes, **so that they will turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then their sins will be forgiven, and by faith in me they will become part of God's holy people.**"

Paul recounts his testimony several times in Acts before rulers. The vision of Jesus is detailed here and the mission he was given to preach about the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

Acts 26:22-23 "But all this time God has helped me, and I have preached both to the rich and to the poor. I have told them only what **the prophets and Moses said** would happen.

I told them how the **Messiah would suffer and be the first to be raised from death**, so that he could bring light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

Repeatedly there is an appeal to the Scripture to show that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead. That is the message from the beginning and it is still the Message of the Gospel whereby we find forgiveness and life everlasting in Jesus.

Acts 28:25-27 "Since they could not agree among themselves, they started leaving. But Paul said, "The **Holy Spirit** said the right thing when he sent Isaiah the prophet to tell our ancestors, 'Go to these people and tell them: You will listen and listen, but never understand. You will look and look, but never see. All of you have stubborn hearts. Your ears are stopped up, and your eyes are covered. You cannot see or hear or understand. If you could, you would turn to me, and I would heal you.'"

This is the last summary in the book of Acts. The Christian belief in the Holy Spirit is well-founded in the early beginning of the church. Paul spoke about the Holy Spirit sending Isaiah the prophet in the 8th century BC to warn people about being stubborn, not wanting to hear, and understand. If the people in the 8th century would turn to him, they would be healed, and this remains true for the world today, including the Muslim world, if you will turn to Jesus you will be healed.

We have looked at the early church, from the very beginning, and found that Spirit was pervasive in the spread of the Gospel. The Spirit of God was instrumental in the transformation of people. The basis of the Trinity is found not only in the words of Jesus as we have seen in the Gospels, but here as the church expands.

We now turn to the letters of the apostle Paul who wrote all of his epistles before 64 AD.

We do not know the exact date that Paul was put to death by the Romans.

We will start with Romans. The New Testament books were most likely written before 70 AD. Jesus said that the Temple would be destroyed in that generation. If books were written after 70 AD it would have been easy to confirm that prediction and make use of it. There are no references to the destruction of the Temple in any of the books.

Romans, written by Paul about 57 AD to the believers in Rome.

Rom. 1:1-4 "From Paul, a servant of **Christ Jesus**. God chose me to be an apostle, and he appointed me to preach the good news that he promised long ago by what his prophets said in the holy Scriptures. This good news is about **his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! As a human, he was from the family of David. But the Holy Spirit proved that Jesus is the powerful Son of God, because he was raised from death.**"

The letter to the Romans is one of the more doctrinal letters. From the beginning he speaks of the Son who was put to death but he was proven to be the Son of God by the Holy Spirit because of his being raised from death.

Rom. 1:7-9 "This letter is to all of you in Rome. God loves you and has chosen you to be his very own people. **I pray that God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! First, **I thank God in the name of Jesus Christ for all of you.** I do this because people everywhere in the world are talking about your faith. God has seen how I never stop praying for you, while I serve him with all my heart and tell **the good news about his Son.**"

There is prayer to God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ—one God. The father was known by his revelation in the Old Testament. The good news is about his Son, our Lord, who became incarnate, died on the cross, was raised to life again, and is now in the presence of the Father. The presence of Christ's Spirit is the continuing ministry of Christ in the world.

Rom. 1:11 "I want to see you and share with you the same blessings that **God's Spirit** has given me. Then you will grow stronger in your faith."

The Spirit of God blesses us with his presence and keeps us in union with Christ.

Rom. 2:15-16 "This proves that the conscience is like a law written in the human heart. And it will show whether we are forgiven or condemned, when **God appoints Jesus Christ to judge everyone's secret thoughts, just as my message says.**"

Since Jesus Christ has been appointed by God to judge the world, then the whole world, including the Muslim world, needs to take notice of this coming event. It won't be Mohammed, Buddha, Hari Krishna, or even Moses. **Only Jesus.**

Rom. 3:22-25 "God treats everyone alike. **He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ.** All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. **God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so that by faith in him we could come to God.** And God did this to show that in the past he was right to be patient and forgive sinners. This also shows that God is right when he accepts people who have faith in Jesus."

What is God like? He is merciful. His grace and mercy brought about the sending of Christ to be our sacrifice that we might be forgiven. This is so great an event that it must not be ignored. It is the only way that God accepts people. To ignore God's great gift is like a slap in the face of God. Would you presume to spit in the face of God?

Rom. 4:24-25 "They were written for us, since we will also be accepted because of our faith in God, who raised our Lord Jesus to life. **God gave Jesus to die for our sins, and he raised him to life, so that we would be made acceptable to God.**"

We were sinners and not acceptable to God. But the marvel is that God gave Jesus to die for our sins and we are now forgiven and made acceptable to God. The death of Jesus is crucial to the New Testament. It is almost on every page of the New Testament.

Rom. 5:1-6 "By faith we have been made acceptable to God. And now, because of our Lord Jesus Christ, we live at peace with God. But that's not all! We gladly suffer, because we know that suffering helps us to endure. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because **God has given us the Holy Spirit**, who fills our hearts with his love. **Christ died for us at a time when we were helpless and sinful.**"

There is so much bound up with the death of Christ on the cross. We were helpless.

By faith we receive God's Spirit, by faith we are forgiven, by faith we have hope, by faith we have God's love in our hearts.

Rom. 5:8-11 "But God showed how much he **loved us by having Christ die for us**, even though we were sinful. But there is more! Now that God has accepted us because Christ sacrificed his life's blood, we will also be kept safe from God's anger. Even when we were God's enemies, he made peace with us, **because his Son died for us**. Yet something even greater than friendship is ours. Now that we are at peace with God, **we will be saved by his Son's life**. And in addition to everything else, we are happy because God sent our Lord Jesus Christ to make peace with us."

God's Son died for us. We will be saved by the Son's life. Don't neglect it.

Rom. 6:2-10 "No, we should not! If we are dead to sin, how can we go on sinning? Don't you know that all who share in **Christ Jesus by being baptized also share in his death**? When we were baptized, **we died and were buried with Christ**. We were baptized, so that we would live a new life, as Christ was raised to life by the glory of God the Father. If we shared in Jesus' death by being baptized, we will be raised to life with him. We know that the persons we used to be were nailed to the cross with Jesus. This was done, so that our sinful bodies would no longer be the slaves of sin. We know that sin doesn't have power over dead people. As surely as we died with Christ, we believe we will also live with him. We know that death no longer has any power over Christ. He died and was raised to life, never again to die. When Christ died, he died for sin once and for all. But now he is alive, and he lives only for God."

By faith in Christ we have a union with Him. This union is more mysterious than marriage itself. Marriage is a mystery in which two people become one by a commitment. In our commitment to Christ as Lord there is a union that stresses what happened to Him happens to us. He died and was raised. We, in union with Him, died to the old life and are raised to a new life in Christ.

Rom. 6:23 "Sin pays off with death. But **God's gift is eternal life given by Jesus Christ our Lord.**"

God has only one way into eternal life. Religious works, rituals, pilgrimages, doing alms, saying prayers repeatedly—these things have no meaning to God apart from Jesus Christ.

God's gift is a gift, it can't be earned. It must be received by faith.

Rom. 7:4 "That is how it is with you, my friends. You are now part of the body of Christ and are dead to the power of the Law. **You are free to belong to Christ, who was raised to life so that we could serve God.**"

The law was given that sin might be recognized for what it is – an offense against God.

All have sinned. How do we get back to God?

Rom. 7:6 "But the Law no longer rules over us. We are like dead people, and it cannot have any power over us. **Now we can serve God in a new way by obeying his Spirit, and not in the old way by obeying the written Law.**"

The Spirit makes us alive in Christ. Since we died in Christ we are no longer under the Law for acceptance before God.

Rom 8:1-6 "**If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won't be punished. The Holy Spirit will give you life that comes from Christ Jesus and will set you free from sin and death.** The Law of Moses cannot do this, because our selfish desires make the Law weak. But God set you free **when he sent his own Son** to be like us sinners

and to be a sacrifice for our sin. God used Christ's body to condemn sin. He did this, so that we would do what the Law commands by **obeying the Spirit instead of our own desires**. People who are ruled by their desires think only of themselves. **Everyone who is ruled by the Holy Spirit** thinks about spiritual things. If our minds are ruled by our desires, we will die. **But if our minds are ruled by the Spirit, we will have life and peace.**"

Two things have to be considered. First, how do we escape the punishment due to our sins, not somebody else's? Second, how do we live life now pleasing to God? The first answer is given in Christ freeing us from sin and death. The second is given in the Holy Spirit ruling our thoughts and desires. When this happens there is life and peace.

Rom. 8:9-11 "You are no longer ruled by your desires, but by God's Spirit, who lives in you. **People who don't have the Spirit of Christ in them don't belong to him**. But Christ lives in you. So you are alive because God has accepted you, even though your bodies must die because of your sins. **Yet God raised Jesus to life! God's Spirit now lives in you, and he will raise you to life by his Spirit.**"

If Islam teaches that there is no Son and therefore no Spirit, then the meaning of the passage is that Muslims do not belong to God. Who do they belong to then?

Rom. 8:14-17 "**Only those people who are led by God's Spirit are his children**. God's Spirit doesn't make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our Father. **God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his children**. His Spirit lets us know that together with Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him."

Here again is raised the question, who are God's children? Muslims do not know whether they will make it to paradise. Even Mohammed wondered about himself. The message of the Gospel is that God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his children and will share in the glory of Christ, forever.

Rom. 8:26-27 "In certain ways we are weak, but the Spirit is here to help us. For example, when we don't know what to pray for, **the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words**. All of our thoughts are known to God. He can understand what is in the mind of the Spirit, as the Spirit prays for God's people."

Who is there to help the person who rejects Jesus as the Son of God? In contrast, the Spirit is to help us. In one of the most important experiences of life, prayer to God, even the Spirit helps us when we pray. Prayer is not just repeated prayers composed by somebody else. Prayer is the cry of the troubled heart seeking God and a relationship with God.

Rom. 8:28-29 "We know that God is always at work for the good of everyone who loves him. They are the ones God has chosen for his purpose, and he has always known who his chosen ones would be. He had decided to let them **become like his own Son, so that his Son would be the first of many children.**"

Other translations say "first of many brethren" which is probably a better rendition.

However, the major truth here is that we Christians are destined to become like God's Son. This transformation is to begin at the day of faith in Christ and continue into eternity.

Rom. 8:31-34 "What can we say about all this? If God is on our side, can anyone be against us? **God did not keep back his own Son, but he gave him for us**. If God did this, won't he freely give us everything else? If God says his chosen ones are acceptable to him, can anyone bring charges against them? Or can anyone condemn them? No indeed! **Christ died and was raised to life, and now he is at God's right side, speaking to him for us.**"

What awesome love and concern for us!! God gave His Son. The Son died for us and was raised to life for us, and now he intercedes for us. Truly, if God is for us, who can be against us?

Rom. 9:1-2 "**I am a follower of Christ, and the Holy Spirit is a witness to my conscience**. So I tell the truth and I am not lying when I say my heart is broken and I am in great sorrow."

Paul's confession of being a follower of Christ and the witness of the Spirit to his truthfulness and conscience. Both persons of the Trinity are linked together again and again.

Rom. 10:9-13 "So you will be saved, if you honestly say, **Jesus is Lord**," and if you believe with all your heart that **God raised him from death**. God will accept you and save you, if you truly believe this and tell it to

others. The Scriptures say that no one who has faith will be disappointed, no matter if that person is a Jew or a Gentile. There is only one Lord, and he is generous to everyone who asks for his help. All who call out to the Lord will be saved."

Do you want to be saved? Do you want to escape the judgement of hell? Will you do what is difficult for you to do in your cultural upbringing? If so, **confess that Jesus is Lord**, and believe in your heart that God raised him from death. Don't ignore God's gracious invitation.

Rom. 12:11 "Never give up. **Eagerly follow the Holy Spirit and serve the Lord.**"

Rom. 14:7-9 "Whether we live or die, it must be for God, rather than for ourselves. Whether we live or die, it must be **for the Lord**. Alive or dead, we still belong to the Lord. This is because Christ died and rose to life, so that he would be the **Lord of the dead and of the living.**"

Paul, the strict monotheist, sees no contradiction in saying that we live or die for God or the Lord.

Rom. 14:14-18 "The Lord Jesus has made it clear to me that God considers all foods fit to eat. But if you think some foods are unfit to eat, then for you they are not fit. If you are hurting others by the foods you eat, you are not guided by love. **Don't let your appetite destroy someone Christ died for. Don't let your right to eat bring shame to Christ.** God's kingdom isn't about eating and drinking. It is about pleasing God, about living in peace, and about true happiness. **All this comes from the Holy Spirit.** If you serve Christ in this way, you will please God and be respected by people."

Christ died. This is repeated again and again, Christ died for our sins. The peace that comes to the believer is from the Holy Spirit which Jesus promised.

Rom. 15:5-7 "God is the one who makes us patient and cheerful. I pray that he will help you live at peace with each other, as you follow Christ. **Then all of you together will praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Honor God by accepting each other, as Christ has accepted you."

We are to praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. To follow Christ is to honor the Father. To honor God is to accept others because Christ has accepted us.

Rom. 15:16-19 "He chose me to be a servant of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles and to do the work of a priest in the service of his good news. **God did this so that the Holy Spirit could make the Gentiles into a holy offering, pleasing to him.** Because of Christ Jesus, I can take pride in my service for God. In fact, all I will talk about is how Christ let me speak and work, so that the Gentiles would obey him. **Indeed, I will tell how Christ worked miracles and wonders by the power of the Holy Spirit.** I have preached the good news about him all the way from Jerusalem to Illyricum."

Christ chose Paul to be a servant to preach the good news about the Son of God coming to earth to die for our sins. This message was supported by the way Christ worked miracles and wonders through the power of the Holy Spirit. What more evidence can one require to believe?

Rom 15:30-33 "My friends, by the power of **the Lord Jesus Christ and by the love that comes from the Holy Spirit**, I beg you to pray sincerely with me and for me. **Pray that God will protect me from the unbelievers** in Judea, and that his people in Jerusalem will be pleased with what I am doing. **Ask God to let me come to you** and have a pleasant and refreshing visit. I pray that God, who gives peace, will be with all of you. Amen."

God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit encompassed in the request for prayer.

Rom. 16:25-27 "**Praise God! He can make you strong by means of my good news, which is the message about Jesus Christ.** For ages and ages this message was kept secret, but now at last it has been told. The eternal God commanded his prophets to write about the good news, so that all nations would obey and have faith. **And now, because of Jesus Christ, we can praise the only wise God forever! Amen.**"

We now turn to the epistles to the **Corinthians**, written about 54 or 55 AD.

1 Cor. 1:1-6 "From Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and from Sosthenes, who is also a follower. To God's church in Corinth. Christ Jesus chose you to be his very own people, and you **worship in his name**, as we and all others do who call him Lord. My prayer is that **God our Father and the Lord Jesus**

Christ will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! I never stop thanking my God for being kind enough to give you Christ Jesus, who helps you speak and understand so well. Now you are certain that everything we told you **about our Lord Christ Jesus is true.**"

The people in Corinth worshiped in the name of Jesus. The Father and the Son are mentioned in Paul's prayer. Paul vouches for his message, everything he told about the Lord Jesus Christ is true.

1 Cor.1:9 "God can be trusted, and he chose you to be partners with his **Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.**"

In the Gospels Jesus called his followers "friends" and here Paul chooses the word "partners" with God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The idea that God's Son has come in the Incarnation is not a late idea evolved over time. It is part of the early Christian understanding of who Jesus really is.

1 Cor. 1:17-18 "Christ did not send me to baptize. He sent me to tell the good news without using big words that would make the **cross of Christ** lose its power. The message about the cross doesn't make any sense to lost people. But for those of us who are being saved, it is God's power at work."

The gospel was the good news that Christ was raised from the dead after the crucifixion.

What makes sense? History affirming the death and resurrection of Jesus, or the words of Mohammed that the cross did not take place. The Gospel leads to hope, the other message leads to hopelessness.

1 Cor. 1:22-23 "Jews ask for miracles, and Greeks want something that sounds wise. But we preach **that Christ was nailed to a cross.** Most Jews have problems with this, and most Gentiles think it is foolish." But the Cross is God's power of salvation to anyone who receives it."

1 Cor. 2:1 "Friends, when I came and told you the mystery that God had shared with us, I didn't use big words or try to sound wise. In fact, while I was with you, I made up my mind to speak only about **Jesus Christ, who had been nailed to a cross.**"

At the risk of repetition we have more claims of the Gospel that Jesus was crucified.

1 Cor. 2:4-5 "When I talked with you or preached, I didn't try to prove anything by sounding wise. I simply let **God's Spirit** show his power. That way you would have faith because of God's power and not because of human wisdom."

One cannot become a Christian by self-will. Reform is not the same as transformation. God's Spirit is necessary to become a believer. One can only receive God's Spirit by receiving Jesus as Lord and Savior. One has to invite Jesus into one's life.

1 Cor.2:8-10 "The rulers of this world didn't know anything about this wisdom. If they had known about it, they would not have **nailed the glorious Lord to a cross.** But it is just as the Scriptures say, "What God has planned for people who love him is more than eyes have seen or ears have heard. It has never even entered our minds!" **God's Spirit** has shown you everything. His Spirit finds out everything, even what is deep in the mind of God."

Information about God cannot be gained by science or philosophy. Only by God's self-revelation can we know about Him. It has never entered the mind of people what God had planned. God's Spirit has shown us the glory of the Gospel.

1 Cor. 2:14 "That's why only someone who has **God's Spirit** can understand spiritual blessings. Anyone who doesn't have **God's Spirit** thinks these blessings are foolish."

Is it a surprise that Muslims think the Gospel is foolish? Without God's Spirit one cannot understand. One looks at life differently when one belongs to Jesus.

1 Cor. 3:10-11 "God was kind and let me become an expert builder. I laid a foundation on which others have built. But we must each be careful how we build, because **Christ is the only foundation.**"

Christ is the only foundation for life. We don't confess Mohammed as an apostle since the foundation is already laid. Life is to be built on Christ, not Mohammed, Sharia, or the model of Mohammed. If the foundation of Christ is rejected, the building will not stand.

1 Cor. 3:16-17 "All of you surely know that you are God's temple and that his **Spirit lives in you**. Together you are God's holy temple, and **God will destroy anyone who destroys his temple.**"

There are two ideas here. The first is the emphasis on God's Spirit and the implications again for the Trinity. The second is that sacredness of God's temple whether it be a group of Christian believers or the single Christian who is the temple of the Spirit. There is a grave warning to jihadist who destroy congregations of Christians or who destroy a single Christian who is the temple of God's Spirit. God will destroy anyone who destroys his temple.

You may kill many Christians, but in so doing you are destroying yourself. There will be no group of virgins waiting in paradise for you. Destruction by God will be your judgement.

1 Cor. 5:6-7 "Stop being proud! Don't you know how a little yeast can spread through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast! Then you will be like fresh bread made without yeast, and that is what you are. **Our Passover lamb is Christ, who has already been sacrificed.**"

The Passover involved the sacrifice of a lamb. Christ is described as the Passover lamb for the Christian in giving his life on the cross. The Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Jewish people from the angel of death in the story of the Exodus. The blood of the lamb was placed on the door posts of the houses. Jesus said that his blood was poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

1 Cor. 6:11 "Some of you used to be like that. But now the name of our **Lord Jesus Christ** and the power of **God's Spirit** have washed you and made you holy and acceptable to God."

Inviting Jesus into your life begins a life changing experience. God's Spirit begins to change the interior life of the believer and one experiences cleansing of sin, guilt, and the past, and the forgiveness that comes changes our relationship with God, we are accepted.

1 Cor. 6:14 "God will raise us from death by the same power that he used **when he raised our Lord to life.**"

God's power at work in believers is the same power that brought Jesus from death to life.

1 Cor. 6:19-20 "You surely know that **your body is a temple where the Holy Spirit lives. The Spirit is in you and is a gift from God**. You are no longer your own. God paid a great price for you. So use your body to honor God."

Jesus promised the Spirit to be in union with the believers. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God. One cannot earn, buy, or win the Holy Spirit. He comes into the life of the believers by faith in Jesus, the crucified Lord.

1 Cor. 7:17 "In every church I tell the people to stay as they were when the **Lord Jesus** chose them and **God** called them to be his own. Now I say the same thing to you."

As one reads the letters of the New Testament there is an interchange between the Lord Jesus and God (the Father). This will be seen in many of the opening letters of the New Testament.

1 Cor. 7:23 "**God** paid a great price for you. So don't become slaves of anyone else."

The price was the death of his Son on the cross.

1 Cor. 8:4-6 "Even though food is offered to idols, we know that none of the idols in this world are alive. After all, there is **only one God**. Many things in heaven and on earth are called gods and lords, but none of them really are gods or lords. We have **only one God**, and he is the **Father**. He created everything, and we live for him. Jesus Christ is our only Lord. Everything was made by him, and by him life was given to us."

Christians have always affirmed monotheism. An infinite eternal Being cannot be fully understood by a finite creature. One can know the character of God only by revelation. The Christian claim is that God became incarnate in Christ Jesus as the Son. The Father is still the Father at the same time that the Incarnation took place. Christians didn't invent this. It is part of the mystery of God that was not fully known before the event, but was revealed by Jesus "in the fullness of time."

1 Cor. 8:10-13 "You know all this, and so it doesn't bother you to eat in the temple of an idol. But suppose a person with a weak conscience sees you and decides to eat food that has been offered to idols. Then **what you know has destroyed someone Christ died for**. When you sin by hurting a follower with a weak conscience,

you sin against Christ. So if I hurt one of the Lord's followers by what I eat, I will never eat meat as long as I live."

The issue was the problem of living in a culture where meat was available from the temple of an idol. Don't destroy the weak brother for whom Christ died. The historical emphasis on the death of Jesus comes out in unusual places and ways. The Christian message cannot be understood without affirming the death of Christ on the cross. History affirms it. Mohammed denied it. Who do you believe was right?

1 Cor. 10:1-9 "Friends, I want to remind you that all of our ancestors walked under the cloud and went through the sea. This was like being baptized and becoming followers of Moses. All of them also ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, which flowed from the spiritual rock that followed them. **That rock was Christ.** But most of them did not please God. So they died, and their bodies were scattered all over the desert. What happened to them is a warning to keep us from wanting to do the same evil things. They worshiped idols, just as the Scriptures say, "The people sat down to eat and drink. Then they got up to dance around." So don't worship idols. Some of those people did shameful things, and in a single day about twenty-three thousand of them died. Don't do shameful things as they did. And don't try to test Christ, as some of them did and were later bitten by poisonous snakes."

When the early Christians learned who Christ really was, God Incarnate, they began to see his work expressed in the Old Testament. In this case the provisions of the Exodus story were really the work of the pre-existent Christ.

1 Cor. 11:23-26 "I have already told you what the Lord Jesus did on the night he was betrayed. And it came from the Lord himself. He took some bread in his hands. Then after he had given thanks, he broke it and said, **"This is my body, which is given for you.** Eat this and remember me." After the meal, Jesus took a cup of wine in his hands and said, "This is my blood, and with it God makes his new agreement with you. Drink this and remember me." The Lord meant that when you eat this bread and drink from this cup, **you tell about his death until he comes.**"

Jesus prepared his disciples for his death by giving them a night to remember in which he instituted what is called the Lord's Supper. The broken body and the blood poured out relate to his death. It is also the beginning of the New Covenant guaranteeing forgiveness to us.

1 Cor. 12:2-5 "I want you to remember that before you became followers of the Lord, you were led in all the wrong ways by idols that cannot even talk. Now I want you to know that if you are led by **God's Spirit, you will say that Jesus is Lord, and you will never curse Jesus. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord...."**

Jesus said that the Spirit would testify of Him. This is confirmed in the life of the believers then and now.

1 Cor. 12:8-11 "Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others **the Spirit** has given great faith or the power to heal the sick or the power to work mighty miracles. Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when **God's Spirit** is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us."

The actions of the Spirit are manifested in the lives of believers in different ways. The gifts of the Spirit are God's gifts for the living of the Christian life and its mission.

1 Cor. 12:13 "Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free. But **God's Spirit** baptized each of us and made us part of **the body of Christ.** Now we each drink from that **same Spirit.**"

When one makes a commitment to another person, such as a spouse, there is a union and what happens to one person affects the other person. In a similar sense, our commitment to Christ involves us with Him in a much deeper sense. We are immersed into Him and we become a part of his body in the church, not a physical building, but his body. The Spirit places us there.

Again, we have two persons of the Trinity involved in this action.

1 Cor. 14:1 "Love should be your guide. Be eager to have the gifts that come from **the Holy Spirit**, especially the gift of prophecy."

The work of the Spirit began in a dramatic way at Pentecost and He is mentioned frequently in the letters of the New Testament. He is always connected with the Father and the Son.

1 Cor. 15:3-8 "I told you the most important part of the message exactly as it was told to me. That part is: **Christ died for our sins**, as the Scriptures say. **He was buried**, and three days later **he was raised to life**, as the Scriptures say. Christ appeared to Peter, then to the twelve. After this, he appeared to **more than five hundred other followers**. Most of them are still alive, but some have died. He also appeared to James, and then to all of the apostles. Finally, he appeared to me, even though I am like someone who was born at the wrong time."

Paul affirms the most important part of the Christian message, Christ died for our sins, was buried, and raised to life three days later. If you don't accept this you simply reject the heart of the Gospel message. It is a message about something that happened recently, in Paul time, and it is the message that changes the world.

1 Cor. 15:12-20 "If we preach that Christ was raised from death, how can some of you say that the dead will not be raised to life? If they won't be raised to life, Christ himself wasn't raised to life. And if Christ wasn't raised to life, our message is worthless, and so is your faith. If the dead won't be raised to life, we have told lies about God by saying that he raised Christ to life, when he really did not. So if the dead won't be raised to life, Christ wasn't raised to life. Unless Christ was raised to life, your faith is useless, and you are still living in your sins. And those people who died after putting their faith in him are completely lost."

There were people like the Sadducees who did not believe in any resurrection. We don't know who Paul refers to here. The fact is that the resurrection did take place and was seen by many people, up to 500 at one time. If the resurrection did not take place their faith was useless and people were completely lost if it did not happen.

1 Cor. 15:20 "But Christ has been **raised to life**! And he makes us certain that others will also be raised to life."

The resurrection of Christ, and the appearance of Jesus to Paul was the motivation for his great travels to share the good news about Jesus. Again, the resurrection presupposes the death on the Cross which is the big problem for the Muslim reader. Over and over the death and resurrection of Jesus are affirmed in the epistles of the New Testament.

1 Cor. 15:23-28 "But we must each wait our turn. Christ was the first to be raised to life, and his people will be raised to life when he returns. Then after **Christ** has destroyed all powers and forces, the end will come, and he will give the kingdom to **God the Father**. Christ will rule until he puts all his enemies under his power, and the last enemy he destroys will be death. When the Scriptures say that he will put everything under his power, they don't include God. It was God who put everything under the power of Christ. After everything is under **the power of God's Son**, he will put himself under the power of God, who put everything under his Son's power. Then God will mean everything to everyone."

This passage points up two different issues. The first issue is that Christ was raised to life and that follows his being put to death. The second point relates God the Father and God's Son who is Jesus the Christ. Repeatedly the statements that relate to the Trinity come up.

II Corinthians, written months later than I Corinthians.

2 Cor. 1:2-3 "I pray that **God our Father** and the **Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! The Father is a merciful God, who always gives us comfort."

The phrase "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" occurs frequently in the epistles. Remember that Paul was a strict monotheist who was involved in killing followers of Jesus, the Christians. Following Jesus' appearance to him on the road to Damascus he now learned that Jesus is Lord, God in the flesh. To speak of the Father and the Son as Lord did not compromise his monotheism.

2 Cor. 1:5 "We share in the terrible sufferings of Christ, but also in the wonderful comfort he gives."

The terrible suffering was the crucifixion.

2 Cor. 1:18-22 "God can be trusted, and so can I, when I say that our answer to you has always been "Yes" and never "No." This is because **Jesus Christ the Son of God** is always "Yes" and never "No." And he is the one that Silas, Timothy, and I told you about. Christ says "Yes" to all of God's promises. That's why we have Christ to say "Amen" for us to the glory of God. And so God makes it possible for you and us to stand firmly together with Christ. **God is also the one who chose us and put his Spirit** in our hearts to show that we belong only to him."

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. God gives his Spirit in our hearts. The trinity is here in a few verses. The Trinity is important, but there is also another wonderful truth here. The Holy Spirit indicates that we belong to Jesus. The Greek word speaks of the Spirit as the guarantee that the promises of God will be fulfilled to us. A follower of Jesus can say with confidence, when I die I will be in the presence of God. This is possible because the Spirit has entered our hearts and lives. Most Muslims have no confidence of going to paradise. It is a waiting game to see what Allah will do. If you are a woman it is even worse. Mohammed claimed to have a vision of hell filled with women, so there is little hope for a Muslim woman. In contrast, the promise of God is Yes! And the Spirit is the Guarantee that it will happen for anyone, man or woman.

2 Cor. 2:14-15 "I am grateful that God always makes it possible for Christ to lead us to victory. God also helps us spread the knowledge about Christ everywhere, and this knowledge is like the smell of perfume. In fact, **God thinks of us as a perfume that brings Christ to everyone**. For people who are being saved, this perfume has a sweet smell and leads them to a better life. But for people who are lost, it has a bad smell and leads them to a horrible death."

The Gospel of Jesus is compared to a perfume that is delightful to one person, but a stench to another. The difference: believing in Jesus or not believing in Him. The believer joys in knowing Jesus. The unbeliever who rejects Jesus regards it all as wrong. The Gospel brings people to a better life now, and everlasting life later.

2 Cor. 3:3-4 "You are like a letter written by **Christ** and delivered by us. But you are not written with pen and ink or on tablets made of stone. You are written in our hearts by **the Spirit of the living God**. We are sure about all this. Christ makes us sure in the very presence of God."

Here is another example of Christ, the Spirit of God, and the Father.

2 Cor. 3:6 "He makes us worthy to be the servants of his new agreement that comes from the **Holy Spirit** and not from a written Law. After all, the Law brings death, but the **Spirit** brings life."

Jesus said that he had come to bring real life. The presence of His Spirit in the believers life produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control, all the good things of life.

2 Cor. 3:8-10 "So won't the agreement that **the Spirit** brings to us be even more wonderful? If something that brings the death sentence is glorious, won't something that makes us acceptable to God be even more glorious? In fact, the new agreement is so wonderful that the Law is no longer glorious at all."

What could be more wonderful than forgiveness by God, a promise by Him that we have everlasting life in his presence, and the presence and gift of his Spirit right now?

2 Cor. 3:17-18 "**The Lord and the Spirit are one and the same**, and the Lord's Spirit sets us free. So our faces are not covered. They show the bright glory of the Lord, as the Lord's Spirit makes us more and more like our glorious Lord."

In the Trinity there is a distinction of persons, but **oneness of nature**. This verse affirms the oneness of the Lord and the Spirit, but the persons are distinct. However, don't overlook the fact that the believer is being transformed by the Spirit. The Spirit is Christ's gift to the believer and is our companion in the journey.

2 Cor. 4:3-5 "If there is anything hidden about our message, it is hidden only to someone who is lost. The god who rules this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers. They cannot see the light, which is the good news about our **glorious Christ, who shows what God is like**. We are not preaching about ourselves. Our message is that **Jesus Christ is Lord**. He also sent us to be your servants."

What keeps you from believing in Jesus as Lord? The answer here is that the god of this world has blinded your mind. This is strong stuff. Ask yourself why! History is on the side of the Gospel, not Mohammed. Don't

be misled by Hollywood's culture to think that they give a picture of Christian life. That is Satan's strategy. The transforming message is that Jesus is Lord. That will change the way you look at the world.

2 Cor. 4:6 "The Scriptures say, "God commanded light to shine in the dark." Now God is shining in our hearts to let you know that **his glory is seen in Jesus Christ.**"

Even Muslims honor Jesus in some sense. But the most important issues are rejected.

God's glory is revealed in Jesus. This is possible because Jesus is the Son of God. God appears in human form and we see his glory. We have been delivered from darkness into light by Jesus.

2 Cor. 4:1 "So we speak because we know that God raised the Lord Jesus to life. And just as God raised Jesus, he will also raise us to life. Then he will bring us into his presence together with you."

Another reference to the resurrection following the crucifixion. This is not merely an event of the past. It is an event that relates to us. Because he was raised we too shall be raised.

Life here is not the end of the story, it is only the beginning. An eternal Being, Yahweh, loves the world and seeks to bring men and women back into a relationship with Himself. It is all His doing. We cannot win, buy, or merit his love. Love is bestowed freely to all who will receive His love. Asking Jesus to come into your heart and life is the first step along the way.

2 Cor. 5:4-5 "These tents we now live in are like a heavy burden, and we groan. But we don't do this just because we want to leave these bodies that will die. It is because we want to change them for bodies that will never die. **God is the one who makes all of this possible.** He has given us his **Spirit** to make us certain that he will do it."

God is not distant and unknowable as in Islam. God does not merely reveal his will as Muslims claim. God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus, and God has given his Spirit as the warranty that his promises will come to pass. One can only say with confidence "I am going to heaven" because one has God's gift of his Spirit.

2 Cor. 5:14-20 "We are ruled by **Christ's love** for us. We are certain that if one person died for everyone else, then all of us have died. And **Christ did die for all of us.** He died so we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the one who died and was raised to life for us. We are careful not to judge people by what they seem to be, though we once judged Christ in that way. Anyone who belongs to **Christ is a new person.** The past is forgotten, and everything is new. **God has done it all! He sent Christ to make peace** between himself and us, and he has given us the work of making peace between himself and others. What we mean is that **God was in Christ**, offering peace and forgiveness to the people of this world. And he has given us the work of sharing his message about peace. We were sent to speak for Christ, and God is begging you to listen to our message. We speak for Christ and sincerely ask you to make peace with God."

These verses are packed with the Gospel. God was in Christ. God sent Christ into the world to make peace. Christ died for us all. God came in Christ seeking to bring us back to Himself. What love! How awesome! God is begging you, dear Muslim, to listen to this message and receive it in your heart.

2 Cor. 6:6-7 "But we have kept ourselves pure and have been understanding, patient, and kind. The **Holy Spirit** has been with us, and our love has been real. We have spoken the truth, and God's power has worked in us. In all our struggles we have said and done only what is right."

If you are tired of your sin, your guilt, and the wretchedness of your existence, the Holy Spirit in your life can make the difference. There is forgiveness, cleansing, and peace in His presence in your life. Please note again that the Holy Spirit is the person of the Trinity spoken about from the beginning of the Christian movement.

2 Cor. 11:3-4 "But now I fear that you will be tricked, just as Eve was tricked by that lying snake. I am afraid that you might stop thinking about **Christ** in an honest and sincere way. We told you about Jesus, and you received the **Holy Spirit** and accepted our message. But you let some people tell you about another Jesus. Now you are ready to receive another spirit and accept a different message."

We are warned about being tricked by false teachers. There were false teachers in Paul's day. People appeared talking about "another Jesus." Their message was false and inadequate. The same may be said about the Qur'an in which the real Jesus is ignored or rejected. Again and again we have seen in the Gospels and

Letters of the New Testament that the real Jesus is the Son of God who died for us. Another example of false teaching is in the book, "A Course in Miracles" which denies the historical Jesus, the fact of sin, and the uniqueness of the Gospel.

2 Cor. 11:31 "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, knows I am not lying. And God is to be praised forever!"

In the midst of describing his suffering Paul affirms the relationship between the Father and the Son in claiming to tell the truth.

2 Cor. 13:4-5 "Although he was weak when he was **nailed to the cross**, he now lives by the power of God. We are weak, just as Christ was. But you will see that we will live by the power of God, just as Christ does. Test yourselves and find out if you really are true to your faith. If you pass the test, you will discover that **Christ is living in you**. But if Christ isn't living in you, you have failed."

Jesus was nailed to the cross. This is repeated a number of times because it is the Gospel, the good news of something that happened recently in that era. A crucifixion alone does nothing but a resurrection following it is all the difference in the world. It means we can live by the power of God. The question that is important for anyone is this: "is Christ living in you?" If not, why not?

2 Cor. 13:13-14 "I pray that the Lord Jesus Christ will bless you and be kind to you! May God bless you with his love, and may the Holy Spirit join all your hearts together."

This Trinitarian statement often concludes many of the letters of Paul.

Galatians, probable date would be 56 AD.

Gal. 1:1-4 "From the apostle Paul and from all the Lord's followers with me. I was chosen to be an apostle by **Jesus Christ and by God the Father**, who raised him from death. No mere human chose or appointed me to this work. To the churches in Galatia. I pray that God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! Christ obeyed God our Father and gave himself as a **sacrifice for our sins** to rescue us from this evil world."

Jesus appeared to Paul and chose him as an apostle which was also an act of God the Father. Moreover, he prayed to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ obeyed the Father in giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Repeatedly the idea of dying for our sins appears in the New Testament.

Gal. 1:7-9 "But some people are causing you trouble and want to make you turn away from the good news about Christ. **I pray that God will punish anyone who preaches anything different from our message to you!** It doesn't matter if that person is one of us or an angel from heaven. I have said it before, and I will say it again. I hope God will punish anyone who preaches anything different from what you have already believed."

The words of Paul relate to anyone who changes the message, even Mohammed. Mohammed certainly changed the Christian message, rejecting the crucifixion and the resurrection of Jesus as well as his death for our sins.

The certainty of Paul's message is found in the following, "My friends, I want you to know that no one made up the message I preach. It wasn't given or taught to me by some mere human. My message came directly from Jesus Christ when he appeared to me." Gal. 1:11-12

"But we know that God accepts only those who have faith in Jesus Christ. No one can please God by simply obeying the Law. So **we put our faith in Christ Jesus, and God accepted us because of our faith.**" Gal. 2:16

The only way to be accepted with God the Father is to have faith in Jesus Christ. Merely acknowledging the existence of Isa in the Qur'an will not do it. He is not trusted as Lord and Savior, as the Son of God. In the Qur'an he is merely a prophet. That is not the Gospel, it is a perversion of the true Gospel.

Gal. 2:19-21 "It was the Law itself that killed me and freed me from its power, so that I could live for God. I have been nailed to the cross with Christ. I have died, but Christ lives in me. And I now live by faith in the **Son of God**, who loved me and gave his life for me. I don't turn my back on God's undeserved kindness. If we can be acceptable to God by obeying the Law, it was useless for Christ to die."

When one sinned the law killed the relationship with God. When one trusts Jesus as Lord and Savior there is a union by faith with him. What happened to Him happens to the believer. Our union with him means we were

also crucified and died to the law. But Christ rose from the dead and we become new creatures in Christ. This happens by faith in the Son of God....who gave his life for us, on the cross.

A deep question arises in this passage. Have you turned your back on God's undeserved kindness?

Gal. 3:1-3 "You stupid Galatians! I told you exactly how **Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross**. Has someone now put an evil spell on you? I want to know only one thing. How were you given **God's Spirit**? Was it by obeying the Law of Moses or by hearing about Christ and having faith in him? How can you be so stupid? Do you think that by yourself you can complete what God's Spirit started in you?"

How unwise can one be? The Gospel preached to them was that Jesus was nailed to a cross. Obedience to the law did not bring the Spirit of God into their lives.

Gal. 3:5-7 "God gives you his **Spirit** and works **miracles in you**. But does he do this because you obey the Law of Moses or because you have heard about Christ and have faith in him? The Scriptures say that God accepted Abraham because **Abraham had faith**. And so, you should understand that everyone who has faith is a child of Abraham."

One of the new things in the Christian faith in contrast to Abraham is that God gives his Spirit to the believer in Christ. Abraham did not have the Spirit indwelling.

Gal. 3:12-14 "The Law isn't based on faith. It promises life only to people who obey its commands. But Christ rescued us from the Law's curse, when he became a curse in our place. This is because the Scriptures say that anyone **who is nailed to a tree is** under a curse. And because of what Jesus Christ has done, the blessing that was promised to Abraham was taken to the Gentiles. This happened so that by faith we would be given **the promised Holy Spirit**."

Have you never broken the law of God? If you have not, great, but the Scripture declares that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That is the curse of the law.

Gal 3:26-29 "**All of you are God's children because of your faith in Christ Jesus**. And when you were baptized, it was as though you had put on Christ in the same way you put on new clothes. Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman. So if you belong to Christ, you are now part of Abraham's family, and you will be given what God has promised."

Faith in Christ has profound results in what it does to all who believe. There is equality in persons. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile (or former Muslim), a slave or a free person, man or woman. Equality is the result of Christ. Anyone denying this equality denies what Christ has done. This is the theological base for equality of women. It has not been applied as it should have been through the centuries around the world. Women have had more freedom in the West than in the East. The position of women in India, in Muslim cultures, in traditional Chinese culture is atrocious. Equality is what Christ gives to each person.

Gal. 4:4-6 "But when the time was right, **God sent his Son**, and a woman gave birth to him. His Son obeyed the Law, so he could set us free from the Law, and we could become God's children. Now that we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts. And his Spirit tells us that God is our Father."

These verses pull together again the ideas that led to the Trinity. God sent his Son, born of a woman, the virgin Mary. The Spirit of his Son tells us that God is our Father. Here we have Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a rich form of monotheism.

Gal. 5:3-6 "If you do, you must obey the whole Law. And if you try to please God by obeying the Law, you have cut yourself off from Christ and his wonderful kindness. **But the Spirit makes us sure that God will accept us because of our faith in Christ**. If you are a follower of Christ Jesus, it makes no difference whether you are circumcised or not. All that matters is your faith that makes you love others."

Paul's comments about trying to obey the whole law cuts one off from Christ. Religious works as a means of trying to please God and win his favor repudiates all that Christ did for us.

What matters is faith in Christ. Then the Holy Spirit is at work in transforming our lives.

People who have a routine of praying 5 times a day, going on pilgrimages, fasting as a cultural practice, etc. are trying to win God's approval. The Gospel says, "it cannot be done."

Trying to win God's favor is like insulting him. What can a pitiful human being do that would win God's favor since we are all sinners?

Gal. 5:16-18 "**If you are guided by the Spirit**, you won't obey your selfish desires. The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other and keeping you from doing what you feel you should. But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you."

Jesus promised the Spirit for the believer to transform the person of faith. Trust in Jesus frees us from the Law of Moses to live by agape, love. If you love someone you will not harm them.

Gal. 5:22-25 "**God's Spirit** makes us loving, happy, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled. There is no law against behaving in any of these ways. And because we belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life, and so we should follow the Spirit."

The goal of God's Spirit is to transform the follower of Christ. The Spirit brings love, joy, peace, patience, etc. People have sought happiness in all the wrong places. Here is the place for finding happiness.

Gal. 6:7-8 "You cannot fool God, so don't make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. If you follow your selfish desires, you will harvest destruction, **but if you follow the Spirit**, you will harvest eternal life."

Do you want eternal life? The choice is yours.

Gal. 6:12 "Those people who are telling you to get circumcised are only trying to show how important they are. And they don't want to get into trouble for **preaching about the cross of Christ**."

Some people followed Paul around insisting that believers in Jesus be circumcised.

The early church rejected this requirement. Here Paul criticized them in seeking to avoid persecution about the preaching of the cross of Christ. That was the new message from God and if he had not been preaching about the crucified Lord he would not have been persecuted.

One parting comment, you can't fool God. If you follow the Spirit you will have eternal life. Who would want less than life in God's presence. It cannot be achieved by religious rites, only by the grace and gift of God in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Ephesians, written probably about 60 AD.

Eph. 1:2-6 "I pray that **God our Father** and our **Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual blessings that Christ has brought us from heaven! Before the world was created, God had Christ choose us to live with him and to be his holy and innocent and loving people. God was kind and decided that Christ would choose us to be God's own adopted children. God was very kind to us because of the **Son** he dearly loves, and so we should praise God."

Before the world was created, God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ choose us to live with him as his loving people. Meditate on this paragraph. Creation was not a quirk. It came about because God is love and love bestows worth and value on others.

Eph. 1:7-9 "**Christ sacrificed his life's blood to set us free**, which means that our sins are now forgiven. Christ did this because God was so kind to us. God has great wisdom and understanding, and by what **Christ has done, God has shown us his own mysterious ways**."

Vengeance is the rule of so much of the world. God has come in the person of Jesus to declare that forgiveness is the goal of life. God forgives and we must forgive. Transformation is possible in Jesus.

Eph. 1:10-14 "Then when the time is right, God will do all that he has planned, and **Christ will bring together everything in heaven and on earth**. God always does what he plans, and that's why he appointed Christ to choose us. He did this so that we Jews would bring honor to him and be the first ones to have hope because of him. **Christ also brought you the truth, which is the good news about how you can be saved**. You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised **Holy Spirit** to show that you belong to God. The

Spirit also makes us sure that we will be given what God has stored up for his people. Then we will be set free, and God will be honored and praised."

Jesus Christ is the means of understanding the meaning of the universe. Christ brought us the truth. There is no other truth because other truth claims are different from Him. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Hinduism, Lao-tzu, whoever, all claim a different message. Jesus claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life, and if that is true, other claims are wrong.

That is politically incorrect in a multi-cultural world, but America is probably the only culture in which multi-culturalism is accepted. Islam does not accept multi-culturalism.

Here again the Greek word for earnest money, or down payment is used. The Spirit given the believer to confirm to us that we are God's adopted sons and daughters, and he will fulfill his promise to us.

Eph. 1:17 "I ask the glorious **Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you his Spirit**. The Spirit will make you wise and let you understand what it means to know God."

These are the phrases that required the doctrine of the trinity to be formed. The doctrine is an attempt to deal with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as spoken of in the New Testament.

Eph. 1:19-23 "I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when **he raised Christ from death** and let him sit at his right side in heaven. There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and **will rule in the future world as well**. God has put **all things under the power of Christ**, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything. **The church is Christ's body** and is filled with Christ who completely fills everything."

The power of God is described in doing the seeming impossible—raising Christ from death. Power is important to many people of the world and the jihadist goal is to subjugate everyone to the power of Islam. Whatever transpires in this world by human depravity, the ultimate power is that of Christ and his body, composed of believers through the centuries. Their future is assured in his presence. The jihadist have no place in the kingdom of God, and there is no paradise of virgins for them. That is a lie given from Satan.

Eph. 2:12-16 "At that time you did not know about Christ. You were foreigners to the people of Israel, and you had no part in the promises that God had made to them. You were living in this world without hope and without God, and you were far from God. **But Christ offered his life's blood as a sacrifice** and brought you near God. Christ has made peace between Jews and Gentiles, and he has united us by breaking down the wall of hatred that separated us. Christ gave his own body to destroy the Law of Moses with all its rules and commands. He even brought Jews and Gentiles together as though we were only one person, when he united us in peace. **On the cross Christ did away with our hatred for each other**. He also made peace between us and God by uniting Jews and Gentiles in one body."

In Paul's day there were two divisions of people, Jews and Gentiles. There was hatred between them. Today there are many divisions, Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, etc. However, the same truth prevails. In Christ there is no division of people. All are one in Him. When people realize that Christ died for them it turns their world upside down. Christ brings peace to all who trust him.

Eph. 2:18-19 "And because of **Christ, all of us can come to the Father by the same Spirit**. You Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens with everyone else who belongs to the family of God."

God in Christ reveals the Father and the Spirit. We become part of the family of God.

Eph. 2:22 "And you are part of that building Christ has built as a place for God's own **Spirit** to live."

The believer is compared to a building that someone occupies. In this case the believer is the "building" in which God's own Spirit lives and transforms our lives like unto Christ.

Eph. 3:11-12 "**God** did this according to his eternal plan. And he was able to do what he had planned because of all that **Christ Jesus our Lord** had done. Christ now gives us courage and confidence, so that we can come to God by faith."

God is not distant and unapproachable. He has come to us. We are invited into his presence by faith. Faith in Jesus means we are accepted by God the Father.

Eph. 3:14-17 "I kneel in prayer to the **Father**. All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from him. God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that his **Spirit** will make you become strong followers and that **Christ** will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in his love."

Prayer is to the Father by the Spirit through Christ, our Lord. The statements of the trinity are used in the generation of Jesus.

Eph. 4:3-6 "Try your best to let **God's Spirit** keep your hearts united. Do this by living at peace. All of you are part of the same body. There is only one **Spirit of God**, just as you were given one hope when you were chosen to be God's people. We have only one **Lord**, one faith, and one baptism. There is one God who is the **Father** of all people. Not only is God above all others, but he works by using all of us, and **he lives in all of us**."

The interchange of terms stresses the oneness of the nature of God with the distinction of three persons. We have the Spirit of God, the Lord, and in this passage the Father who "lives in us." But we have been seeing the phrases "Christ lives in us," and the Spirit lives in us. Now we have the statement that the Father "lives in us." God is at work in us whether we use the term Father, Son, or Holy Spirit. The persons are co-equal, co-eternal and oneness in nature.

Eph. 4:13 "This will continue until we are united by our faith and by our understanding of the Son of God. Then we will be mature, just as Christ is, and we will be completely like him."

The Son of God came to transform his followers. Spiritual growth begins in a new birth and continues to the ultimate transforming like him.

Eph. 4:30-32 "Don't make **God's Spirit** sad. The Spirit makes you sure that someday you will be free from your sins. Stop being bitter and angry and mad at others. Don't yell at one another or curse each other or ever be rude. Instead, be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as **God forgave** you because of **Christ**."

The relationship of God involves the Spirit who is a person who can be grieved. The Spirit is also the assurance of forgiveness from God who forgave because of Christ. Followers of Christ are to forgive because God forgives.

Eph. 5:2 "Let love be your guide. Christ loved us and **offered his life for us as a sacrifice** that pleases God."

Why would anyone reject the sacrifice of Christ as a historical event? It is written all over the New Testament in the first generation. The crucifixion is also mentioned in pagan as well as Jewish documents.

Eph. 5:5 "Being greedy, indecent, or immoral is just another way of worshiping idols. You can be sure that people who behave in this way will never be part of the kingdom that belongs **to Christ and to God**."

The kingdom of God belongs to the followers of Christ. When you belong to Christ you belong to God. You can't belong to God without belonging to Christ first.

Eph. 5:18-21 "Don't destroy yourself by getting drunk, but let the **Spirit** fill your life. When you meet together, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as you praise the Lord with all your heart. Always use the name of our **Lord Jesus Christ** to thank **God the Father** for everything. Honor Christ and put others first. A husband should love his wife as much as **Christ loved the church and gave his life for it**."

The persons of the Trinity are mentioned here in terms of prayer, in terms of the filling of one's life with the Spirit rather than meaningless activities. At the same time the love of Christ for the church emphasizes the fact he gave his life for it. It is irrational for Muslims to say that these events did not happen. It is also wrong to say that Christians did not believe in the Trinity until centuries later. The New Testament documents verify the early expressions of the Trinity.

Eph. 5:25 "A husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church and **gave his life** for it."

Two remarkable ideas are here. First, the important issue that Christ died for the world and his love for those who become part of his body, the church. The second is that husbands are to love their wives like Christ loved the church. Compare this with the practice of wife beating as sanctioned by Mohammed and the Qur'an. It is never ok to beat a wife!

Eph. 6:17-18 "Let God's saving power be like a helmet, and for a sword use God's message that comes from the **Spirit**. Never stop praying, especially for others. Always pray by the power of the Spirit. Stay alert and keep praying for God's people."

The Gospel's power comes from the Spirit. Prayer is also related to the Spirit's power.

Eph. 6:23-24 "I pray that **God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** will give peace, love, and faith to every follower! May God be kind to everyone who keeps on loving our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here is the similar greeting that ends Paul's letters.

Philippians, probably written about 61 AD.

Phil. 1:2-3 "I pray that **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! Every time I think of you, I thank my God."

The Father and the Son are linked together. The eternal Father and the eternal Son. If God is Father, he must always have been Father, and the Son must always have been the eternal Son. There is no change in the Father from eternity. If God is love there must always have been a beloved, the Son, and the Spirit of love between the Father and the Son.

Phil. 1:19 "I will keep on being glad, because I know that your prayers and the help that comes from the **Spirit of Christ Jesus** will keep me safe."

The Spirit of Christ Jesus is the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that he would give to us a comforter to be with us forever.

Phil. 2:1 "**Christ encourages you**, and his love comforts you. **God's Spirit** unites you, and you are concerned for others."

Two persons of the Trinity are mentioned here in terms of love and unity.

Phil. 2:4-11 "Care about them as much as you care about yourselves and think the same way that Christ Jesus thought: **Christ was truly God**. But he did not try to remain equal with God. Instead he gave up everything and became a slave, when **he became like one of us**. Christ was humble. He obeyed God and even **died on a cross**. Then God gave Christ the highest place and honored his name above all others. So at the name of Jesus everyone will bow down, those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. And to the **glory of God the Father** everyone will openly agree, "**Jesus Christ is Lord!**"

Philippians was written about 60 AD. There is no time for legendization about Jesus to take place. It takes centuries for that process to develop. Here in the first generation Jesus the Christ is said to be truly God. The incarnation means he became human like one of us. He died on the cross and was resurrected. The event is so monumental that everyone will eventually fall on their knees and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Many will do it willingly. Many will do it unwillingly as they face the judgement of God before departing from the presence of light into darkness. The horror of hell is not what God will do to me, but what I do to myself. It is my own doing. God gave his Son for us. Don't wait until judgement day.

Phil. 3:3 "But we are the ones who are truly circumcised, because we worship by the power of God's Spirit and take pride in Christ Jesus."

Paul was deeply aware that the worship of God involved a relationship of the Spirit of God and Jesus Christ.

Phil. 3:7-11 "But Christ has shown me that what I once thought was valuable is worthless. Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I have given up everything else and count it all as garbage. All I want is Christ and to know that I belong to him. I could not make myself acceptable to God by obeying the Law of Moses. God accepted me simply because of my faith in Christ. All I want is to know Christ and **the power that raised him to life**. I want to suffer and die as he did, so that somehow I also may be raised to life."

Paul's confession of the worth of Christ surpasses all he had ever treasured. The past was like garbage in comparison to the joy of knowing Jesus as the Savior, the Christ, the Son of God.

Phil. 3:18-21 "I often warned you that many people are living as **enemies of the cross of Christ**. And now with tears in my eyes, I warn you again that they are headed for hell! They worship their stomachs and brag

about the disgusting things they do. All they can think about are the things of this world. But we are citizens of heaven and are eagerly waiting for **our Savior** to come from there. **Our Lord Jesus Christ** has power over everything, and he will make these poor bodies of ours like his own glorious body."

Muslims are living as enemies of the cross of Christ in their denial of that event. The judgement of Scripture is that "they are headed for hell." The message of the Gospel is that Muslims come to Jesus that they might wait eagerly for Christ's coming from heaven.

Phil. 4:7 "Then, because you belong to **Christ Jesus, God** will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel."

Christ Jesus and God are linked together. God approves of who Jesus is and what he has done.

Phil. 4:19-20 "I pray that God will take care of all your needs with the wonderful blessings that come from Christ Jesus! May God our Father be praised forever and ever. Amen."

A similar conclusion involving God our Father and the Lord Jesus.

Colossians, this book was also written about 60 AD.

Col. 1:1-4 "From Paul, chosen by God to be an apostle of **Christ Jesus**, and from Timothy, who is also a follower. To God's people who live in Colossae and are faithful followers of Christ. I pray that **God our Father** will be kind to you and will bless you with **peace**! Each time we pray for you, we thank **God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. We have heard of your **faith in Christ** and of your love for all of God's people..."

Grace is God's reaching down, peace is the result of it. Love comes about because God is love and his love is manifested in Christ. When we love him, we learn to love others.

The two persons, Father and Son, or God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, are permeating the writings of the early Christians.

Col. 1:7-10 "... from our good friend Epaphras. He works together with us for **Christ** and is a faithful worker for you. He is also the one who told us about the love that **God's Spirit** has given you. We have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. In fact, we always pray that God will show you everything he wants you to do and that you may have all the wisdom and understanding that his **Spirit** gives. Then you will live a life that honors the **Lord**, and you will always please him by doing good deeds. You will come to **know God even better**."

The Spirit is not some nebulous force, but an eternal person who indwells the believer. The Spirit gives wisdom and understanding. Living in the Spirit honors the Lord and by pleasing the Lord one comes to know God even better.

The Spirit teaches us to love, have joy, and live in His wisdom. In contrast, there are madrassas where young children are taught to hate Jews, Christians and infidels. They are taught to destroy human life, to keep women in bondage, and even destroy themselves if they have a chance to kill others. Only Satan would be happy with such teaching.

Col. 1:12-16 "I pray that you will be grateful to God for letting you have part in what he has promised his people in the kingdom of light. **God rescued us** from the dark power of Satan and brought us into the **kingdom of his dear Son**, who forgives our sins and sets us free. **Christ is exactly like God**, who cannot be seen. He is the **first-born Son**, superior to all creation. Everything was created by him, everything in heaven and on earth, everything seen and unseen, including all forces and powers, and all rulers and authorities. **All things were created by God's Son, and everything was made for him**."

There is so much in this passage to consider. We have God rescuing us. We are brought into the kingdom of his dear Son. Christ is exactly like God. We cannot see God but people did see Jesus Christ. Jesus said to his disciples, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. We know what God is like because of Jesus telling us of his own nature. The first born Son phrase has no relation to time birth, but the idea of pre-eminence. Psalm 89:27 gives an example of this when God said, "I have chosen David as my first born son, and he will be ruler of all the kings on the earth." David was the last born in the family of Jesse. The idea is that David would have pre-eminence. In the same sense Jesus is exalted because of the incarnation. The creativity of the Son is seen in the comment that all things were created by the Son.

Col. 1:19-22 "God himself was pleased to **live fully in his Son**. And God was pleased for him to make peace by **sacrificing his blood on the cross**, so that all beings in heaven and on earth would be brought back to God. You used to be far from God. Your thoughts made you his enemies, and you did evil things. But his **Son became a human and died**. So God made peace with you, and now he lets you stand in his presence as people who are holy and faultless and innocent."

The incarnation was God's plan. God was manifest in the Son. His Son became a human and died, sacrificing his blood on the cross. While we are centuries later than the events described here, it is still possible that one's thoughts makes one an enemy of God. If you are denying the incarnation and crucifixion you are making yourself an enemy of God. God has done the unbelievable action of becoming human for you. Don't be an enemy of God.

Col. 2:5-7 "Even though I am not with you, I keep thinking about you. I am glad to know that you are living as you should and that your faith in Christ is strong. **You have accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord**. Now keep on following him. Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation for your life. Be strong in your faith, just as you were taught. And be grateful."

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is God in the flesh. This is the foundation for your life.

It is not Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, or anyone else. Why build on something that has no future in eternity.

Col. 2:9-15 "**God lives fully in Christ**. And you are fully grown because you belong to Christ, who is over every power and authority. Christ has also taken away your selfish desires, just as circumcision removes flesh from the body. And when you were baptized, it was the same as being **buried with Christ**. Then you were raised to life because you had faith in the power of God, **who raised Christ from death**. God wiped out the charges that were against us for disobeying the Law of Moses. He took them away and **nailed them to the cross**. There Christ defeated all powers and forces. He let the whole world see them being led away as prisoners when he celebrated his victory."

Who is Jesus? The first sentence gives the answer. Who he was is important. What he did is also important. He died for our sins and was resurrected after 3 days. Jesus stands out in contrast to other so-called religious leaders in who he was, what he did, and when he went to heaven.

Col. 3:11-13 "It doesn't matter if you are a Greek or a Jew, or if you are circumcised or not. You may even be a barbarian or a Scythian, and you may be a slave or a free person. Yet Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. **God loves you** and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as **Christ has forgiven you**."

Who can forgive sin? Only God. The believers at Colossae were taught that God loves them and that Christ has forgiven their sins. If you have Christ you have God, but you can't have God without Christ.

Col. 3:15-17 "Each one of you is part of the body of Christ, and you were chosen to live together in peace. So let the peace that comes from Christ control your thoughts. And be grateful. Let the message about Christ completely fill your lives, while you use all your wisdom to teach and instruct each other. With thankful hearts, sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Whatever you say or do should be done in the name of the **Lord Jesus**, as you give thanks to **God the Father** because of him."

When Christ fills your life there is thanksgiving, singing, love and peace toward others.

The trinity is a unity of community. Life as a Christian is to reflect this unity in community.

One gives thanks because of the Lord Jesus to the Father.

Thessalonians, this letter was written about the year 50-51. This would be 20 years after the Ascension of the Lord Jesus.

1 Th. 1:1-3 "From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica, the people of **God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. I pray that God will be kind to you and will bless you with peace! We thank God for you and always mention you in our prayers. Each time we pray, we tell God our Father about your faith and loving work and about your firm hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

The opening letter repeats the prayer and thanksgiving to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Keep in mind that this letter was written only 20 years after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The two persons of the Trinity spoken here are the Father and the Son. Shortly we will have a reference to the Holy Spirit.

1 Th. 1:5-6 "When we told you the good news, it was with the power and assurance that come from the **Holy Spirit**, and not simply with words. You knew what kind of people we were and how we helped you. So, when you accepted the message, you followed our example and the example of the **Lord**. You suffered, but the **Holy Spirit** made you glad."

The Spirit brings power and assurance to the life of the believers. In the midst of persecution for their faith, the Holy Spirit made them glad. Similarly, the apostles in Acts rejoiced when they suffered for Jesus.

It must be remembered that the Christians were persecuted. They did not persecute and there is not a shred of evidence for advocating Christians to persecute anyone.

1 Th. 1:9-10 "Everyone is talking about how you welcomed us and how you turned away from idols to serve the true and living God. They also tell how you are waiting for **his Son Jesus** to come from heaven. **God raised him from death**, and on the day of judgment Jesus will save us from God's anger."

The true and living God has a Son named Jesus. Don't forget it. He died on a cross and was raised from death and will be coming again.

If God is love why will He be angry? Perhaps the answer is in the insult that people make in the face of God's great mercy. What else can he do? He revealed himself, he entered into human life, died on a cross for our sins, was raised to life, gave his Spirit to all who believe with the assurance of everlasting life in his presence. If you turn from that what is left but separation from God. He is angry that you did not accept his gift and grace. He is angry for what you are doing to yourself when He has something so much better for you—life.

1 Th. 2:14-15 "My friends, you did just like **God's churches** in Judea and like the other followers of **Christ Jesus** there. And so, you were mistreated by your own people, in the same way they were mistreated by their people. Those Jews **killed the Lord Jesus** and the prophets, and they even chased us away. God doesn't like what they do and neither does anyone else."

Mention is made of God's churches while other places the church is the body of Christ.

Same thing. The crucifixion is again mentioned.

1 Th. 3:11-12 "We pray that God our Father and our Lord Jesus will let us visit you. May the **Lord** make your love for each other and for everyone else grow by leaps and bounds. That's how our love for you has grown."

Prayer to the Father and the Lord Jesus again stressing their relationship. The aim of living the Christian lifestyle is love for each other.

1 Th. 4:1-3 "Finally, my dear friends, since you belong to the **Lord Jesus**, we beg and urge you to live as we taught you. **Then you will please God**. You are already living that way, but try even harder. Remember the instructions we gave you as followers of the Lord Jesus. God wants you to be holy, so don't be immoral in matters of sex."

Living in union with the Lord Jesus is the way to please God.

1 Th. 4:8 "So if you don't obey these rules, you are not really disobeying us. You are disobeying **God, who gives you his Holy Spirit**."

Christian living has instruction, but the motivation is the Holy Spirit indwelling the believer.

1 Th. 4:14-17 "We believe that **Jesus died and was raised to life**. We also believe that when God brings Jesus back again, he will bring with him all who had faith in Jesus before they died. **Our Lord Jesus** told us that when he comes, we won't go up to meet him ahead of his followers who have already died. With a loud command and with the shout of the chief angel and a blast of God's trumpet, the Lord will return from heaven. Then those who had **faith in Christ** before they died will be raised to life. Next, all of us who are still alive will be taken up into the clouds together with them to **meet the Lord in the sky**. From that time on we will all be with the Lord forever."

The death and resurrection become the background for understanding Jesus' second coming. This description is quite different than the Muslim view of Jesus' return in which the trees cry out that a Jew is hiding behind it and calls to have the Jew killed.

1 Th. 5:9-10 "God doesn't intend to punish us, but wants us to be saved by our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ died for us, so that we could live with him, whether we are alive or dead when he comes."

The importance of the death of Jesus is so that we could live with him forever.

Islam cannot make such a promise for it denies the death of Jesus.

1 Th. 5:18-19 "Whatever happens, keep thanking God because of Jesus Christ. This is what God wants you to do. Don't turn away God's Spirit...."

We should give thanks to God for what Jesus Christ has done for us. Turning away from God's Spirit is to be ungrateful and unbelieving.

II Thessalonians, written probably a few weeks later than the first letter to clear up their misunderstanding.

2 Th. 1:1-2 "From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica, the people of **God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ**. I pray that God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!"

A new letter brings the same style of greeting about God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Th. 1:6-10 "It is only right for **God** to punish everyone who is causing you trouble, but he will give you relief from your troubles. He will do the same for us, when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven with his powerful angels and with a flaming fire. **Our Lord Jesus** will punish anyone who doesn't know God and won't obey his message. Their punishment will be eternal destruction, and they will be kept far from the presence of our Lord and his glorious strength. This will happen on that day when the **Lord returns** to be praised and honored by all who have faith in him and belong to him. This includes you, because you believed what we said."

Punishment must come from God, not man. The Lord is patient, but his patience will run out at the end of the age. The anger of God is because his great grace has been spurned. God will let people have their own way to their own self-destruction. Jesus never told his followers to do violence to non-believers. Jihad is part of the Islamic world-view, not the Christian view of God.

2 Th.2:12-14 "Then, because **God and our Lord Jesus Christ are so kind**, you will bring honor to the name of our Lord Jesus, and he will bring honor to you. My friends, the **Lord loves you**, and it is only natural for us to thank God for you. God chose you to be the first ones to be saved. **His Spirit made you holy**, and you put your faith in the truth. God used our preaching as his way of inviting you to share in the **glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**."

God's love is so huge, so deep, and awesome. By trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior we are invited to share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. God's love is bound up with the Son. Without the Son there is no glory.

2 Th. 2:16-17 "God our Father loves us. He is kind and has given us eternal comfort and a wonderful hope. We pray that our **Lord Jesus Christ and God our Father** will encourage you and help you always to do and say the right thing."

What a contrast to Allah who loves only the obedient ones. God loves us even while we are yet sinners. His love brings us to Him. God is the great Lover who seeks the lost persons.

I Timothy, the date on this book would be somewhere around 64 AD before Paul's death.

1 Tim. 1:1-2 "From Paul. **God our Savior and Christ Jesus** commanded me to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, who gives us hope. Timothy, because of our faith, you are like a son to me. I pray that **God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind and merciful to you. May they bless you with peace!"

This greeting we have seen in all of his letters. God our Father is also God our Savior. The Father and Son are closely linked together.

1 Tim. 1:12-16 "I thank **Christ Jesus our Lord**. He has given me the strength for my work because he knew that he could trust me. I used to say terrible and insulting things about him, and I was cruel. But he had mercy on

me because I didn't know what I was doing, and I had not yet put my faith in him. Christ Jesus our Lord was very kind to me. He has greatly blessed my life with faith and love just like his own. "**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**" This saying is true, and it can be trusted. I was the worst sinner of all! But since I was worse than anyone else, **God had mercy on me** and let me be an example of the endless patience of Christ Jesus. He did this so that others would put their faith in Christ and have eternal life."

Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, and this appears repeatedly. Christ came into the world—the incarnation—and he came to give everlasting life to all who trusts in Him.

1 Tim. 2:2-6 "Pray for kings and others in power, so that we may live quiet and peaceful lives as we worship and honor God. This kind of prayer is good, and it pleases **God our Savior**. God wants everyone to be saved and to know the whole truth, which is, **There is only one God**, and **Christ Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God**. Jesus was truly human, and he gave himself to rescue all of us. God showed us this at the right time."

Jesus is the only one who can bring us to God because He is the Son of God, or God incarnate. No mere human can bring us to God. Mohammed is dead, Buddha is dead, Mahavira is dead, and all the rest. They cannot do anything for us, but the Son of God can.

1 Tim. 3:16 "Here is the great mystery of our religion: **Christ came as a human**. The **Spirit** proved that **he pleased God**, and he was seen by angels. Christ was preached to the nations. People in this world put their faith in him, and he was taken up to glory."

The Incarnation is affirmed again. Here again is the relation of the Spirit and God the Father. The fact that he was taken up to glory presupposes his resurrection.

1 Tim. 4:1-2 "God's Spirit clearly says that in the last days many people will turn from their faith. They will be fooled by evil spirits and by teachings that come from demons. They will also be fooled by the false claims of liars whose consciences have lost all feeling."

God's Spirit is God in the world. God's Spirit teaches, directs, and warns. Here we are given the warning about people turning away from their faith in the last days. False teachers will be led by evil spirits and demons to deceive people. There are lots of examples of this happening.

1 Tim. 4:10 "We have put our **hope in the living God, who is the Savior of everyone**, but especially of those who have faith. That's why we work and struggle so hard."

There is an interchange of terms in which God is the Savior, Christ is the Savior and no problems existed in doing this. God the Father expresses the motivation of love, Christ the Son carries out the motivation in the Incarnation, and the Spirit carries the believer through life into the presence of everlasting life because of faith.

1 Tim. 6:3 "Anyone who teaches something different disagrees with the correct and godly **teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ**."

There are many through the pages of history who have done this. Mohammed is probably the best known example.

1 Tim. 6:14-16 "Promise to obey completely and fully all that you have been told until our Lord Jesus Christ returns. The glorious God is the only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords. At the time that God has already decided, he will send Jesus Christ back again. Only God lives forever! And he lives in light that no one can come near. No human has ever seen God or ever can see him. God will be honored, and his power will last forever. Amen."

Jesus, the Lord, will return. Who is the King of kings and Lord of lords? Does this refer to God the Father or Jesus? Revelation 17:14 speaks of Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

II Timothy, the date would be about 67 or the spring of 68 at the latest.

2 Tim. 1:1-2 "From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus. God himself chose me to be an apostle, and he gave me the promised life that Jesus Christ makes possible. Timothy, you are like a dear child to me. I pray that **God our Father and our Lord Christ Jesus** will be kind and merciful to you and will bless you with peace!"

The close relation exists also in this letter indicating that Jesus is Lord.

2 Tim. 1:7-10 "God's Spirit doesn't make cowards out of us. **The Spirit gives us power, love, and self-control.** Don't be ashamed to speak for **our Lord.** And don't be ashamed of me, just because I am in jail for serving him. Use the power that comes from **God** and join with me in suffering for telling the good news. God saved us and chose us to be his holy people. We did nothing to deserve this, but God planned it because he is so kind. Even before time began God planned for Christ Jesus to show kindness to us. Now Christ Jesus has come to show us the kindness of God. **Christ our Savior** defeated death and brought us the good news. It shines like a light and offers life that never ends."

In this passage we are told of the activity of the Spirit—power, love and self-control—along with what Christ has done in defeating death. The act of Christ made possible the giving of the Spirit to all who trust Him.

2 Tim. 1:13-14 "Now follow the example of the correct teaching I gave you, and let the faith and love of **Christ Jesus** be your model. You have been trusted with a wonderful treasure. Guard it with the help of the **Holy Spirit, who lives within you.**"

Here is the person of Christ is linked to the Holy Spirit. The model is Jesus, the help toward that life style comes from the Holy Spirit living within.

2 Tim. 2:11-13 "Here is a true message: **"If we died with Christ,** we will live with him. If we don't give up, we will rule with him. If we deny that we know him, he will deny that he knows us. If we are not faithful, he will still be faithful. Christ cannot deny who he is."

Dying with Christ is only possible by the faith connection in which giving ourselves to him we can experience the dying of our old way of life and gaining a new life in Him.

2 Tim. 4:1 "When Christ Jesus comes as king, he will be the judge of everyone, whether they are living or dead. So with **God and Christ as witnesses,** I command you to preach God's message. Do it willingly, even if it isn't the popular thing to do. You must correct people and point out their sins. But also cheer them up, and when you instruct them, always be patient.

The witness of God the Father is seen in Christ the Son. Christ is coming as King and Judge never to die again.

Titus, written about 64 AD before 2 Timothy and after 1 Timothy.

Tit. 1:2-4 "Then they will have the hope of eternal life that God promised long ago. And God never tells a lie! So, at the proper time, **God our Savior** gave this message and told me to announce what he had said. Titus, because of our faith, you are like a son to me. I pray that **God our Father and Christ Jesus our Savior** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!"

The act of God reconciling the world to Himself is intimately related to the persons of the Godhead. God our Savior and Christ Jesus our Savior are interchangeable. In a sense what one person of the Trinity does, they all do. Some actions are ascribed to one person, but it is the full nature of God that is involved in the act.

Tit. 2:13-14 "We are filled with hope, as we wait for the glorious return of our **great God and Savior Jesus Christ.** He **gave himself to rescue** us from everything that is evil and to make our hearts pure. He wanted us to be his own people and to be eager to do right."

Here Jesus is the Great God and Savior who gave himself referring to the Cross.

Tit. 3:4-8 "**God our Savior** showed us how good and kind he is. He saved us because of his mercy, and not because of any good things that we have done. God washed us by the power of the **Holy Spirit.** He gave us new birth and a fresh beginning. **God sent Jesus Christ our Savior to give us his Spirit.** Jesus treated us much better than we deserve. He made us acceptable to God and gave us the hope of eternal life."

The Savior is God through Jesus Christ who gives the Holy Spirit to those who believe.

The end result is that there is the gift of everlasting life.

Philemon, probably about 60 AD.

Phm 1:3 "I pray that **God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ** will be kind to you and will bless you with peace!"

In this very short letter we have the same greeting about God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. This is only a letter to person, but the greeting conveys the same theological truth as the letters to the churches.

Hebrews, a book written while temple sacrifices were still conducted, and before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Perhaps a date of 63-65 AD.

Heb. 1:1-3 "Long ago in many ways and at many times God's prophets spoke his message to our ancestors. But now at last, **God sent his Son** to bring his message to us. **God created the universe by his Son**, and everything will someday belong to the Son. **God's Son has all the brightness of God's own glory and is like him in every way**. By his own mighty word, he holds the universe together. After the **Son had washed away our sins**, he sat down at the right side of the glorious God in heaven."

The Son is emphasized in this book in many ways. Here the creation is a work of the Son, and the Son has all the qualities of the Father. He holds the universe together. The Son also dealt with our sins, washing them away on the cross.

Heb. 1:5-8 "God has never said to any of the angels, "You are my Son, because today I have become your Father!" Neither has God said to any of them, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son!" When God brings his first-born Son into the world, he commands all of his angels to worship him. And when God speaks about the angels, he says, "I change my angels into wind and my servants into flaming fire." But **God says about his Son, "You are God, and you will rule as King forever! Your royal power brings about justice."**

Angels are exalted creations, but the Son is not even related to them. He is God and will rule as King forever.

Heb. 1:10-13 "The Scriptures also say, "In the beginning, **Lord**, you were the one who laid the foundation of the earth and created the heavens. They will all disappear and wear out like clothes, but **you will last forever**. You will roll them up like a robe and change them like a garment. But you are always the same, and you will live forever." God never said to any of the angels, "Sit at my right side until I make your enemies into a footstool for you!"

Here we have another affirmation of the role of Christ in creation. The world will end but He will not.

Heb. 2:4 "**God** himself showed that his message was true by working all kinds of powerful miracles and wonders. He also gave his **Holy Spirit** to anyone he chose to."

The miracles in the life of Jesus indicated God's power and approval of Him. The apostles were used to perform wonderful miracles to show that the message was true. Jesus was shown to be the Son of God by the resurrection. While these special events occurred God gives his Holy Spirit to anyone who believes. The Spirit is another indication of the Trinity of God.

Heb. 2:9-11 "What we do see is **Jesus**, who for a little while was made lower than the angels. **Because of God's wonderful kindness, Jesus died for everyone**. And now that Jesus has suffered and died, he is crowned with glory and honor! Everything belongs to God, and all things were created by his power. So God did the right thing when he made Jesus perfect by suffering, as Jesus led many of God's children to be saved and to share in his glory. Jesus and the people he makes holy all belong to the same family. That is why he isn't ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters."

Here the death of Jesus is confirmed as elsewhere in many places. This is something that God did for us.

Heb. 2:14-18 "We are people of flesh and blood. That is why **Jesus became one of us. He died to destroy the devil**, who had power over death. But he also died to rescue all of us who live each day in fear of dying. Jesus clearly did not come to help angels, but he did come to help Abraham's descendants. He had to be one of us, so that he could serve God as our merciful and faithful high priest and **sacrifice himself for the forgiveness of our sins**. And now that Jesus has suffered and was tempted, he can help anyone else who is tempted."

Mohammed is dead. Buddha is dead. All the others are dead. Who is alive? Only Jesus.

He can help anyone who is tempted today, now, or in whatever century one has lived.

Mohammed and Buddha did not help anyone, nor can they today.

Heb. 3:5-8 "Moses was a faithful servant and told God's people what would be said in the future. But **Christ is the Son in charge of God's people**. And we are those people, if we keep on being brave and don't lose hope. It is just as the **Holy Spirit says**, "If you hear God's voice today, don't be stubborn! Don't rebel like those people who were tested in the desert."

If Christ is the Son in charge of God's people, what is your relation to Him? Hear the warning of the Holy Spirit about being stubborn. Don't rebel because of false teaching.

Heb. 4:14-16 "We have a great high priest, who has gone into heaven, and he is **Jesus the Son of God**. That is why we must hold on to what we have said about him. Jesus understands every weakness of ours, because **he was tempted in every way that we are. But he did not sin!** So whenever we are in need, we should come bravely before the throne of our merciful God. There we will be treated with undeserved kindness, and we will find help."

Jesus the Son of God experienced temptation but did not sin. No one else in all the world can say that. Muslims regard Mohammed as the man to imitate, but Mohammed had to ask forgiveness of Allah. Jesus came to give forgiveness, and did not need to ask for it.

Heb. 5:5-10 "That is how it was with Christ. He became a high priest, but not just because he wanted the honor of being one. It was God who told him, "You are my Son, because today I have become your Father!" In another place, God says, "You are a priest forever just like Melchizedek." God had the power to save Jesus from death. And while Jesus was on earth, he begged God with loud crying and tears to save him. He truly worshiped God, and God listened to his prayers. **Jesus is God's own Son**, but still he had to suffer before he could learn what it really means to obey God. Suffering made Jesus perfect, and now he can save forever all who obey him. This is because God chose him to be a high priest like Melchizedek."

The affirmation that Jesus is God's own Son should make a Muslim consider what he has been taught and why. There are many warnings in the Scripture about denying that Jesus is the Son of God. This denial cuts one off from the family of God.

Heb. 6:4-6 "But what about people who turn away after they have already seen the light and have received the gift from heaven and have shared in the **Holy Spirit**? What about those who turn away after they have received the good message of God and the powers of the future world? There is no way to bring them back. **What they are doing is the same as nailing the Son of God to a cross and insulting him in public!**"

To deny the cross is to insult God. To deny that Jesus is the Son of God is to insult God.

To deny the Holy Spirit is to insult God. Why would anyone want to insult God?

Heb. 7:25-28 "He is forever able to save the people he leads to God, because **he always lives to speak to God for them**. Jesus is the high priest we need. He is holy and innocent and faultless, and not at all like us sinners. Jesus is honored above all beings in heaven, and he is better than any other high priest. Jesus doesn't need to offer sacrifices each day for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. **He offered a sacrifice once for all, when he gave himself**. The Law appoints priests who have weaknesses. But God's promise, which came later than the Law, **appoints his Son**. And he is the perfect high priest forever."

One of the problems facing a person is how to get to God. We cannot get there on our own. We have sinned. We are alienated from God. God is holy and we cannot enter his presence. So how can we know about God. Jesus is our Savior, our leader into the presence of God. Jesus is the mediator between us and God. God the Father has appointed God the Son to be the mediator between sinful man and the holy God. He has done this by offering Himself for us. This is reflected in the following verse.

Heb. 8:1 "What I mean is that we have a high priest who sits at the **right side of God's** great throne in heaven."

This passages goes on to say that Jesus is the maker of the New Covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (31:31ff), Ezekiel (16:60, 37:26), and Isaiah (55:3, 61:8) in which God promises to forgive our sins and put his laws in our hearts.

Heb. 9:8-12 "All of this is the **Holy Spirit's way of saying** that no one could enter the most holy place while the tent was still the place of worship. This also has a meaning for today. It shows that we cannot make our

consciences clear by offering gifts and sacrifices. These rules are merely about such things as eating and drinking and ceremonies for washing ourselves. And rules about physical things will last only until the time comes to change them for something better. Christ came as the high priest of the good things that are now here. He also went into a much better tent that wasn't made by humans and that doesn't belong to this world. Then Christ went once for all into the most holy place and freed us from sin forever. **He did this by offering his own blood instead of the blood of goats and bulls."**

There is a similarity between Jewish ritual practices and Muslim ritual practices. We cannot make our conscience clear by washing of the body which does not touch the interior of our being. The sacrifice of Christ did away with these practices. Instead of water for the body, the Holy Spirit cleanses the soul. Rituals are a deception and waste of time. It appears one is doing something when in reality rituals keep one from encountering **God**.

Heb. 9:14-15 **"But Christ was sinless, and he offered himself as an eternal and spiritual sacrifice to God. That's why his blood is much more powerful and makes our consciences clear. Now we can serve the living God and no longer do things that lead to death. Christ died to rescue those who had sinned and broken the old agreement. Now he brings his chosen ones a new agreement with its guarantee of God's eternal blessings!"**

The Muslim has a problem when it comes to Jesus. There is a certain respect and regard for him as a prophet. Very little is said about Jesus claiming to be a prophet. We have seen in the Gospels and now the rest of the New Testament that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, the Savior. He is much more than a prophet. Here He is the one who brings the guarantee of God's eternal blessings!! Please don't take the word of Mohammed concerning Jesus and miss out on God's great blessings for eternity.

Heb. 9:24-28 "This is why Christ did not go into a tent that had been made by humans and was only a copy of the real one. Instead, he went into heaven and **is now there with God to help us**. Christ did not have to offer himself many times. He wasn't like a high priest who goes into the most holy place each year to offer the blood of an animal. If he had offered himself every year, he would have suffered many times since the creation of the world. But instead, near the end of time he offered himself once and for all, so that he could be a sacrifice that does away with sin. We die only once, and then we are judged. **So Christ died only once to take away the sins of many people. But when he comes again, it will not be to take away sin. He will come to save everyone who is waiting for him."**

The first coming was to deal with sin. The second coming of Jesus will be to save everyone waiting for him. He died once and will die no more. We will die once and die no more because of his death for us. There is no second death for the Christian. There is the second death to those who reject Christ. Being cast away from the presence of God is to be cast into hell.

Heb. 10:5-7 **"When Christ came into the world**, he said to God, "Sacrifices and offerings are not what you want, but you have given me my body. No, you are not pleased with animal sacrifices and offerings for sin." Then Christ said, "And so, my God, I have come to do what you want, as the Scriptures say."

These verses along with others affirm the pre-existence of Christ, the Messiah, who became embodied in Jesus. What he came to do is mentioned in the following verses.

Heb. 10:10-17 "So we are made holy because **Christ obeyed God and offered himself once for all**. The priests do their work each day, and they keep on offering sacrifices that can never take away sins. But Christ offered himself as a sacrifice that is good forever. Now he is **sitting at God's right side**, and he will stay there until his enemies are put under his power. By his one sacrifice he has forever set free from sin the people he brings to God. **The Holy Spirit also speaks** of this by telling us that the Lord said, "When the time comes, I will make an agreement with them. I will write my laws on their minds and hearts. Then I will forget about their sins and no longer remember their evil deeds.""

Repeatedly the reference to Christ's death meets us as we read the New Testament. It is intimately connected with forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and life in the presence of God.

Heb. 10:18-20 "When sins are forgiven, there is no more need to offer sacrifices. My friends, **the blood of Jesus** gives us courage to enter the most holy place by a new way that leads to life! And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself."

The blood of Jesus refers to his death on the cross. He opened the way into the presence of God so that we can pray with confidence that He will hear us.

Heb. 10:29-31 "But it is much worse to **dishonor God's Son** and to disgrace the blood of the promise that made us holy. And it is just as bad to **insult the Holy Spirit**, who shows us mercy. We know that God has said he will punish and take revenge. We also know that the Scriptures say the Lord will judge his people. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God!"

The sacred texts of the Bible give to us the early teaching of the church as the Gospel was preached. There were people who insulted the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. To deny that God sent his Son into the world is not only an insult, but it is a deliberate turning away from God's gift.

Heb. 12:2-3 "We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete. He **endured the shame of being nailed to a cross**, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side of God's throne! So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up."

If you don't keep your eyes on Jesus, who are you looking at? In these passages you have been given a glimpse of a loving God who reveals himself, promises the gift of his Spirit in your life, with forgiveness and everlasting life to boot. Allah does not reveal himself, (only his will) does not give everlasting life in his presence, and is stingy with the idea of forgiveness. Compare the Son of God with a man who claims to be a prophet.

Heb. 12:22-25 "You have now come to Mount Zion and to the heavenly Jerusalem. This is the **city of the living God**, where thousands and thousands of angels have come to celebrate.

Here you will find all of God's dearest children, whose names are written in heaven. And you will find God himself, who judges everyone. Here also are the spirits of those good people who have been made perfect. And **Jesus is here!** He is the one who makes God's new agreement with us, and **his sprinkled blood** says much better things than the blood of Abel. Make sure that you obey the one who speaks to you. The people did not escape, when they refused to obey the one who spoke to them at Mount Sinai. **Do you think you can possibly escape, if you refuse to obey the one who speaks to you from heaven?"**

A Christian who suffered persecution looked forward to the presence of God. Here encouraging words are given concerning the city of God where Jesus is, who made the new covenant with his own life's blood. Consider the options involved in refusing God's grace and pursuing your own path.

Heb. 13:8 "Jesus Christ never changes! He is the same yesterday, today, and forever."

He was the pre-existent Son, he became embodied in Jesus in history, and is now forever the Son of God in heaven who will return yet in the future.

Heb. 13:12-15 "Jesus himself **suffered outside the city gate**, so that his blood would make people holy. That's why we should go outside the camp to Jesus and share in his disgrace.

On this earth we don't have a city that lasts forever, but we are waiting for such a city. Our sacrifice is to keep offering praise to God in the name of Jesus."

The crucifixion was outside the city at the place of the skull where criminals were crucified. Jesus suffered there. His life and death and resurrection make it possible for us to have everlasting life and we can praise God in the name of Jesus.

Heb. 13:20-21 "God gives peace, and **he raised our Lord Jesus Christ from death**. Now Jesus is like a Great Shepherd whose blood was used to make **God's eternal agreement** with his flock. I pray that God will make you ready to obey him and that you will always be eager to do right. May Jesus help you do what pleases God. To Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever! Amen."

The assurance of heaven is not based on my good works, but on Christ's eternal agreement. Mohammed didn't like music and in some countries Muslims now forbid music. But in the presence of God there will be rejoicing, praising God in song with all the angels. Joy unspeakable will be experienced in the presence of God's people and His presence.

James, the book was written sometime between 45 and 48 AD.

Jas. 1:1 "From James, a servant of **God and of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Greetings to the twelve tribes scattered all over the world."

There was no awareness of conflict between being a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. To serve one is to serve the other.

Jas. 2:1 "My friends, if you have faith in our **glorious Lord Jesus Christ**, you won't treat some people better than others."

Christ treated people in equality, both men and women, and position did not rank with Him. Therefore, the followers of Jesus are to imitate his life.

Jas. 3:9 "My dear friends, with our tongues we speak both praises and curses. **We praise our Lord and Father**, and we curse people who were created to be like God, and this isn't right."

Praise to the Father and to the Son, or praise to the Lord and the Father. This is from James, a devout monotheist, who came to experience the Father in the Son.

Jas. 4:5 "Do you doubt the Scriptures that say, "**God truly cares about the Spirit** he has put in us"?"

James is also aware of God's Spirit, a gift for all believers.

I Peter, written somewhere around 64-65.

1 Pet. 1:2-4 "**God the Father** decided to choose you as his people, and **his Spirit** has made you holy. You have obeyed **Jesus Christ** and are sprinkled with his blood. I pray that God will be kind to you and will keep on giving you peace! **Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. God is so good, and by **raising Jesus from death**, he has given us new life and a hope that lives on. God has something stored up for you in heaven, where it will never decay or be ruined or disappear."

In this passage we have the references to the tri-personality of God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, one God in three distinct, but not separate persons. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father, and the Spirit is in both of them. When you have the Spirit you have the Son, and the Father.

1 Pet. 1:10-12 "Some prophets told how kind God would be to you, and they searched hard to find out more about the way you would be saved. **The Spirit of Christ** was in them and was telling them how Christ would suffer and would then be given great honor. So they searched to find out exactly who Christ would be and when this would happen. But they were told that they were serving you and not themselves. They preached to you by the power of the **Holy Spirit**, who was sent from heaven. And their message was only for you, even though angels would like to know more about it."

The Spirit of God did not just appear on the scene in the Christian era. The prophets were inspired by the Spirit of God. A remarkable passage in Exodus 31:3 describes Bezalel who was filled with God's Spirit, "Not only have I filled him with my Spirit, but I have given him wisdom and made him a skilled craftsman who can create objects of art with gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood." There are many other references in the Old Testament to the Spirit of God.

1 Pet. 1:13 "Be alert and think straight. Put all your hope in how kind God will be to you when Jesus Christ appears."

Muslims believe that Jesus is coming again. They have some erroneous views about what is going to happen. Mohammed is not coming again. There is only one person who has hope and help for us—that is Jesus. Put your hope in Him.

1 Pet. 1:19-21 "You were rescued by the precious **blood of Christ**, that spotless and innocent lamb. Christ was chosen even before the world was created, but because of you, he did not come until these last days. And

when he did come, it was to lead you to have faith in **God, who raised him from death and honored him in a glorious way**. That's why you have put your faith and hope in God."

It is only our stubbornness that keeps us from accepting what God has planned for us in eternity. Muslims reject the blood of Christ because of Mohammed. Mohammed was a man, not the Son of God. The story of Jesus is head and shoulders above Mohammed. There is a world of difference between the two. Jesus died for us. Mohammed had people killed for revenge. Jesus was raised from death and that is why all should put their faith in Him.

1 Pet 2:4-7 "Come to Jesus Christ. He is the living stone that people have rejected, but which God has chosen and highly honored. And now you are living stones that are being used to build a spiritual house. You are also a group of holy priests, and with the help of Jesus Christ you will offer sacrifices that please God. It is just as God says in the Scriptures, "Look! I am placing in Zion a choice and precious cornerstone. No one who has faith in that one will be disappointed." You are followers of the Lord, and that stone is precious to you. But it isn't precious to those who refuse to follow him. They are the builders who tossed aside the stone that turned out to be the most important one of all."

Would you willingly throw away the most precious thing in all the universe? Of course not. You have to judge whether God is speaking through his Son, or through Mohammed. If you reject Mohammed you have not lost anything. If you toss aside the Son of God you have lost everything.

1 Pet. 2:21-25 "After all, God chose you to suffer as you follow in the footsteps of Christ, who set an example by suffering for you. Christ did not sin or ever tell a lie. **Although he was abused, he never tried to get even. And when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he had faith in God, who judges fairly. Christ carried the burden of our sins. He was nailed to the cross, so that we would stop sinning and start living right.** By his cuts and bruises you are healed. You had wandered away like sheep. Now you have returned to the one who is your shepherd and protector."

Mohammed had people killed for satirical poems about him. Contrast that with Jesus who endured the beatings before the crucifixion, and then the agony of the cross itself. He never tried to get even, nor did he threaten those who conspired against him. He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." Dear reader, it is time to turn to the one who is the Good Shepherd, the Savior, the Son of God.

1 Pet. 3:15 "Honor Christ and let him be the **Lord of your life**. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope."

I think it was Luther who compared man to a donkey. The question is who will ride the donkey? Will it be Jesus or Mohammed? This verse urges all to let Jesus Christ be Lord of your life.

1 Pet 3:18 "**Christ died once for our sins. An innocent person died for those who are guilty. Christ did this to bring you to God, when his body was put to death and his spirit was made alive.**"

The death of Christ is the most important event in the life of mankind. Mankind's future turns on accepting this event. Why would Mohammed reject this event and deceive his followers?

1 Pet. 3:21-22 "Those flood waters were like baptism that now saves you. But baptism is more than just washing your body. It means turning to God with a clear conscience, **because Jesus Christ was raised from death**. Christ is now in heaven, where he sits at the right side of God. All angels, authorities, and powers are under his control."

A clear conscience is only possible because of the death and resurrection of Christ. The stain of everyone's personal sin is on their lives until they are cleansed by the Risen Lord.

1 Pet. 4:13-14 "Be glad for the chance to suffer as Christ suffered. It will prepare you for even greater happiness when he makes his glorious return. Count it a blessing when you suffer for being a Christian. This shows that **God's glorious Spirit** is with you."

He suffered on the cross. He will return. Suffering for being a Christian is made endurable by the Spirit within us. Christians have endured horrendous suffering at the hands of pagans, Muslims, and Communists.

1 Pet. 5:1 "Church leaders, I am writing to encourage you. I too am a leader, as well as a witness to **Christ's suffering**, and I will share in his glory when it is shown to us."

There are many witnesses to Christ's suffering. Peter was one of them. These were eye witnesses.

1 Pet. 5:10-11 "But **God shows** undeserved kindness to everyone. That's why he appointed **Christ Jesus** to choose you to share in his eternal glory. You will suffer for a while, but God will make you complete, steady, strong, and firm. God will be in control forever! Amen."

If God appointed Christ Jesus to be the way of sharing his eternal glory, there is no other way. If a Muslim rejects the role that Christ is given, is this based on anything other than the comments of Mohammed? Is it rational to accept Mohammed's view of the history of the past when all the non-Muslim world stands on the historical documentation affirming the crucifixion of Jesus?

II Peter, written shortly before Peter's death at 66 or 67 AD.

2 Pet. 1:1-2 "From Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. To everyone who shares with us in the privilege of believing that our **God and Savior Jesus Christ** will do what is just and fair. I pray that God will be kind to you and will let you live in perfect peace! May you keep **learning more and more about God and our Lord Jesus.**"

Who is our great God and Savior? Jesus Christ! When you learn about God you are learning about Jesus Christ. When you are learning about Jesus Christ you are learning about God. A problem with Muslims is that they don't know much about Jesus Christ even though they claim to respect Him.

2 Pet. 1:10-11 "My friends, you must do all you can to show that **God has really chosen** and selected you. If you keep on doing this, you won't stumble and fall. **Then our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** will give you a glorious welcome into his kingdom that will last forever."

Who will welcome you to heaven? The story of the Gospel of Jesus is that it will be the Lord Jesus himself. Does he know you? Do you know him? Do you want to be in heaven?

2 Pet. 1:16-18 "When we told you about the power and the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, we were not telling clever stories that someone had made up. But with our own eyes we saw his true greatness. **God, our great and wonderful Father, truly honored him by saying, "This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him."** We were there with Jesus on the holy mountain and heard this voice speak from heaven."

Peter could not forget the experience with Jesus on the mount. The message from the Father was, "this is my own Son." When Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus the response to him was "Lord." If you give your heart to Jesus you will discover Him as the Son of God, the Lord.

2 Pet. 1:20-21 "But you need to realize that no one alone can understand any of the prophecies in the Scriptures. The prophets did not think these things up on their own, but they were guided by the **Spirit of God.**"

The prophecies spoke of a suffering Messiah, Immanuel—God with us, the everlasting Father, and these ideas were given by the Spirit of God centuries before the birth of Jesus.

2 Pet. 3:18 "Let the wonderful kindness and the understanding that come from **our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ** help you to keep on growing. Praise Jesus now and forever! Amen."

The kindness of Jesus is unparalleled in the world. His presence has brought an understanding of God the Father, forgiveness, the gift of the Spirit, changed lives, the elevation of women, mercy of all kinds.

I John, some believe these letters were written before Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD. Others favor later in the century about 90 AD. It would seem that some allusion would be made to the destruction of Jerusalem if the letters were written after that event. No New Testament document reflects on that prophecy of Jesus being fulfilled. Hence, it makes more sense to affirm them as being written before 70 AD.

1 Jn. 1:1-3 "**The Word that gives life was from the beginning**, and this is the one our message is about. Our ears have heard, our own eyes have seen, and our hands touched this Word. The one who gives life appeared! We saw it happen, and we are witnesses to what we have seen. Now we are telling you about this **eternal life that was with the Father and appeared to us.** We are telling you what we have seen and heard, so that you may share in this life with us. **And we share in it with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**"

Another reference to the Incarnation. The Son appeared in human form, Jesus, and he is the one who gives life, to begin with, and everlasting life to those who trust Him as Savior.

1 Jn. 1:7 "But if we live in the light, as God does, we share in life with each other. And the blood of his **Son Jesus washes all our sins away.**"

When you commit your life to Christ the problem of sin and guilt is settled.

1 Jn. 2:2-3 "**Christ is the sacrifice that takes away our sins** and the sins of all the world's people. When we obey God, we are sure that we know him."

Obedying God is to obey the Son.

1 Jn. 2:22-27 "And a liar is anyone who says that Jesus isn't truly Christ. Anyone who says this is an enemy of **Christ and rejects both the Father and the Son**. If we reject the Son, we reject the Father. **But if we say that we accept the Son, we have the Father**. Keep thinking about the message you first heard, and you will always be one in **your heart with the Son and with the Father**. The Son has promised us eternal life. I am writing to warn you about those people who are misleading you. But **Christ has blessed you with the Holy Spirit**. Now the Spirit stays in you, and you don't need any teachers. The Spirit is truthful and teaches you everything. So stay one in your heart with Christ, just as the Spirit has taught you to do."

The theme that you have the Father and the Son together appears over and over. If you do not have the Son, you don't have the Father. The Son promises eternal life. No one else can make that claim and deliver on it, only Jesus the Son. Don't call God a liar in saying the Son does not exist, nor the Spirit.

1 Jn. 3:8-10 "Anyone who keeps on sinning belongs to the devil. He has sinned from the beginning, but **the Son of God came to destroy all that he has done**. God's children cannot keep on being sinful. His life-giving power lives in them and makes them his children, so that they cannot keep on sinning. You can tell God's children from the devil's children, because those who belong to the devil refuse to do right or to love each other."

The power of the Son of God will be displayed ultimately in the destruction of the Devil and all his works.

1 Jn. 3:16 "**We know what love is because Jesus gave his life for us**. That's why we must give our lives for each other."

This verse can only be seen from the standpoint of the crucifixion, a historical fact.

1 Jn. 3:23-24 "**God wants us to have faith in his Son Jesus Christ and to love each other**. This is also what Jesus taught us to do. If we obey God's commandments, we will stay one in our hearts with him, and he will stay one with us. **The Spirit that he has given us is proof that we are one with him.**"

Faith in the Son, prescribed by the Father, brings about love. The proof of this relationship is that the Spirit has been given to us. The Greek word translated "one" is the word also translated "union," to be in union with Christ. We know that we are in union with Christ because of the gift of the Spirit.

When the early Christians learned all of this about God, they were led in time to formulate a doctrine of the trinity. The concepts are in the early writings, the doctrinal expression was formulated later. It is difficult to read these ideas without being brought to think of God in a more elaborate way than unitarianism, or Islamic concept.

1 Jn. 4:1-2 "Dear friends, don't believe everyone who claims to have the Spirit of God. Test them all to find out if they really do come from God. **Many false prophets** have already gone out into the world, and you can know which ones come from God. His Spirit says that Jesus Christ had a truly human body."

The false prophets roving around in the first century were the emerging Gnostics who denied that real body of Jesus Christ. His body was an illusion, not really real. But this letter also relates to other prophets, as in the case of Mohammed, who denied Jesus as the Son of God.

1 Jn. 4:4-6 "Children, you belong to God, and you have defeated these enemies. **God's Spirit** is in you and is more powerful than the one that is in the world. These enemies belong to this world, and the world listens to them, because they speak its language. **We belong to God, and everyone who knows God will listen to us**. But the people who don't know God won't listen to us. That is how we can tell **the Spirit** that speaks the truth from the one that tells lies."

Many Muslims will not listen to the truth. The judgement of this verse is that they don't know God. Muslims do not have the Spirit of God in their lives.

1 Jn. 4:9-10 "God showed his love for us when **he sent his only Son** into the world to give us life. Real love isn't our love for God, but his love for us. **God sent his Son to be the sacrifice by which our sins are forgiven.**"

It seems burdensome to mention again the idea of God's Son, his only Son, the giving of his life as a sacrifice for our sins. One of the purposes of this study was to point up the repeated emphasis on these ideas. They are the message of the Gospel from the beginning to the end.

1 Jn. 4:13-16 "**God has given us his Spirit.** That is how we know that we are one with him, just as he is one with us. **God sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.** We saw his Son and are now telling others about him. God stays one with everyone who openly says that Jesus is the **Son of God.** That's how we stay one with God and are sure that God loves us. God is love. If we keep on loving others, we will stay one in our hearts with God, and he will stay one with us."

This passage points up the problem with Islam. Mohammed did not have God in his life. Whoever Allah was, it was not the same as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father stays with "everyone who openly says that Jesus is the Son of God." Moreover, Mohammed's life does not reflect the love that is related to God.

1 Jn. 5:1 "If we believe that Jesus is truly Christ, we are God's children. Everyone who loves the Father will also love his children."

A better translation would be everyone who loves the Father will also love his child. The verse is referring to the Father and the Son. Because we love the Father we also love the Son.

1 Jn. 5:5 "No one can defeat the world without having faith in **Jesus as the Son of God.**"

The struggles of life are great and defeat lies ahead. How is it possible to defeat the world? Only by faith in Jesus as the Son of God. These are the words of one of Jesus' disciples.

1 Jn. 5:6-13 "**Water and blood came out from the side of Jesus Christ.** It wasn't just water, but water and blood. **The Spirit tells about this,** because the Spirit is truthful. In fact, there are three who tell about it. They are the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and they all agree. We believe what people tell us. But we can trust what God says even more, and **God is the one who has spoken about his Son.** If we have faith in God's Son, we have believed what God has said. **But if we don't believe what God has said about his Son, it is the same as calling God a liar.** God has also said that he gave us eternal life and that this life comes to us from his Son. **And so, if we have God's Son, we have this life. But if we don't have the Son, we don't have this life.** All of you have faith in the Son of God, and I have written to let you know that you have eternal life."

There are serious issues in this passage for Mohammed and his followers. The Spirit is truthful. What does the Spirit say? "If we have faith in God's Son, we have believed what God has said. But if we don't believe what God has said about his Son, it is the same as calling God a liar." Will a Muslim admit that Mohammed called God a liar? This is what the Apostle declared concerning anyone who would not have faith in the Son.

Even more alarming is the statement, "if we don't have the Son, we don't have life."

What does this say about Mohammed? The millions who have followed him? The millions who yet follow him? What does this say about the many countries that do not allow the Christian gospel to be heard?

1 Jn. 5:18-21 "We are sure that God's children do not keep on sinning. **God's own Son protects** them, and the devil cannot harm them. **We are certain that we come from God and that the rest of the world is under the power of the devil.** We know that Jesus **Christ the Son of God has come and has shown us the true God.** And because of Jesus, we now belong to the true God who gives eternal life. Children, you must stay away from idols."

Dear reader, you have been confronted by this letter written by a disciple of Jesus, an eye witness, a companion for the 3 years of Jesus' public ministry, an eye witness to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, a witness to the voice of the Father on the mount in which he declared, "This is my son, hear him!" This letter declares that you need the Son if you want everlasting life. This life is in His presence. There are no paradise virgins for anyone. Don't be deceived. Trust Jesus as the Son of God for your forgiveness, your everlasting destiny in the presence of God, flee the darkness of separation from God for a lack of faith in Jesus.

2 John, probably in the early 60s.

2 Jn. 1:3-4 "I pray that **God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son** will be kind and merciful to us! May they give us peace and truth and love. I was very glad to learn that some of your children are obeying the truth, as the Father told us to do."

2 Jn. 1:9 "Don't keep changing what you were taught about Christ, or else God will no longer be with you. But if you hold firmly to what you were taught, **both the Father and the Son will be with you.**"

This brief letter mentioned the Father and the Son in two places. What does this imply for Mohammed who changed the teachings about Jesus Christ?

Jude, probably about 67 AD.

Jud. 1:1 " From Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and the brother of James. To all who are chosen and loved by **God the Father and are kept safe by Jesus Christ.**"

Jude is a short letter also, but the relation of the Father and Jesus Christ are basic to the letter.

Jud. 1:4 "Some godless people have sneaked in among us and are saying, "God treats us much better than we deserve, and so it is all right to be immoral." **They even deny that we must obey Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord. But long ago the Scriptures warned that these godless people were doomed.**"

Obedying Jesus Christ as our only Master and Lord is the way to escape from false prophets and godlessness in the world.

Jud. 1:18-21 "They told you that near the end of time, selfish and godless people would start making fun of God. And now these people are already making you turn against each other. They think only about this life, and **they don't have God's Spirit.** Dear friends, keep building on the foundation of your most holy faith, as the **Holy Spirit** helps you to pray. And keep in step with **God's love**, as you wait for our **Lord Jesus Christ** to show how kind he is by giving you eternal life."

The importance of God's Spirit in the life of the believers stressed again. The Muslim does not have the Spirit of God in his life because he does not believe in the Holy Spirit nor the source of the Spirit which is the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Jud. 1:24 "Offer praise to **God our Savior because of our Lord Jesus Christ!** Only God can keep you from falling and make you pure and joyful in his glorious presence. Before time began and now and forevermore, God is worthy of glory, honor, power, and authority. Amen."

God is our Savior because Jesus Christ is God in the flesh who died for us, and is our Lord.

Revelation, the date is uncertain. Some propose a date as early as the 50s' or late 60's. Tradition also dates it toward the end of the century.

Rev. 1:5-6 "May kindness and peace be yours from **Jesus Christ**, the faithful witness. **Jesus was the first to conquer death**, and he is the ruler of all earthly kings. Christ loves us, and by **his blood he set us free from our sins**. He lets us rule as kings and serve **God his Father** as priests. To him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen."

The usual themes appear in this book also. Jesus is the conqueror of death, we have been set free from sin by his death, we serve God his Father and we look forward to being in his presence forever.

Rev. 1:8 "The Lord God says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the one who is and was and **is coming**. I am God All-Powerful!"

The speaker is the one to come in the future, Jesus the Christ, who is also the Lord God.

Rev. 1:10 "On the Lord's day the **Spirit took control of me**, and behind me I heard a loud voice that sounded like a trumpet."

The Spirit is the revelator in many of the chapters of the book. The Spirit instructs, teaches, has power to move the listener to various positions.

Rev. 1:13-18 "There with the lamp stands was someone who seemed to be the Son of Man. He was wearing a robe that reached down to his feet, and a gold cloth was wrapped around his chest. His head and his hair were white as wool or snow, and his eyes looked like flames of fire. His feet were glowing like bronze being heated in a furnace, and his voice sounded like the roar of a waterfall. He held seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword was coming from his mouth. His face was shining as bright as the sun at noon. When I saw him, I fell at his feet like a dead person. But he put his right hand on me and said: **Don't be afraid! I am the first, the last, and the living one. I died, but now I am alive forevermore**, and I have the keys to death and the world of the dead."

The person speaking is Jesus, the one who died and is alive, and who has the keys to everlasting life.

Rev. 2:18-19 "This is what you must write to the angel of the church in Thyatira: **I am the Son of God!** My eyes are like flames of fire, and my feet are like bronze. Listen to what I say. I know everything about you, including your love, your faith, your service, and how you have endured. I know that you are doing more now than you have ever done before."

The son of God is Jesus. One cannot evade this claim on the part of Jesus. One can reject it or accept it, and it makes a difference concerning whether one has everlasting life or not.

Rev. 2:29 "If you have ears, listen to **what the Spirit says to the churches.**"

Rev. 3:6 "If you have ears, listen to **what the Spirit says to the churches.**"

The Spirit speaks throughout the book of Revelation. He is a person, not a force, or nebulous idea.

Rev. 21:6-7 "Everything is finished! **I am Alpha and Omega**, the beginning and the end. I will freely give water from the life-giving fountain to everyone who is thirsty. All who win the victory will be given these blessings. **I will be their God, and they will be my people.**"

Do you want to be the people of God in the presence of Jesus on the other side of the grave? It can only be done in Jesus, the Son of God, who gave his life for you.

A Muslim response is that the New Testament has been corrupted. However, the Qur'an gives credibility to the Injil, the Gospels. There are thousands of manuscripts in existence in various parts of the world. Major texts of the New Testament are dated earlier than the time of Mohammed. For dates on these check out [this site](#). The real problem for the Muslim reader is facing the truth of history as opposed to the cultural lie that Mohammed imposed on his followers.

The Muslim claim is that Allah preserved the Qur'an but could not preserve the previous scriptures. If God could not preserve the Old and New Testaments how could one have confidence that He preserved the Qur'an? History is on the side of the Bible, not the Qur'an.